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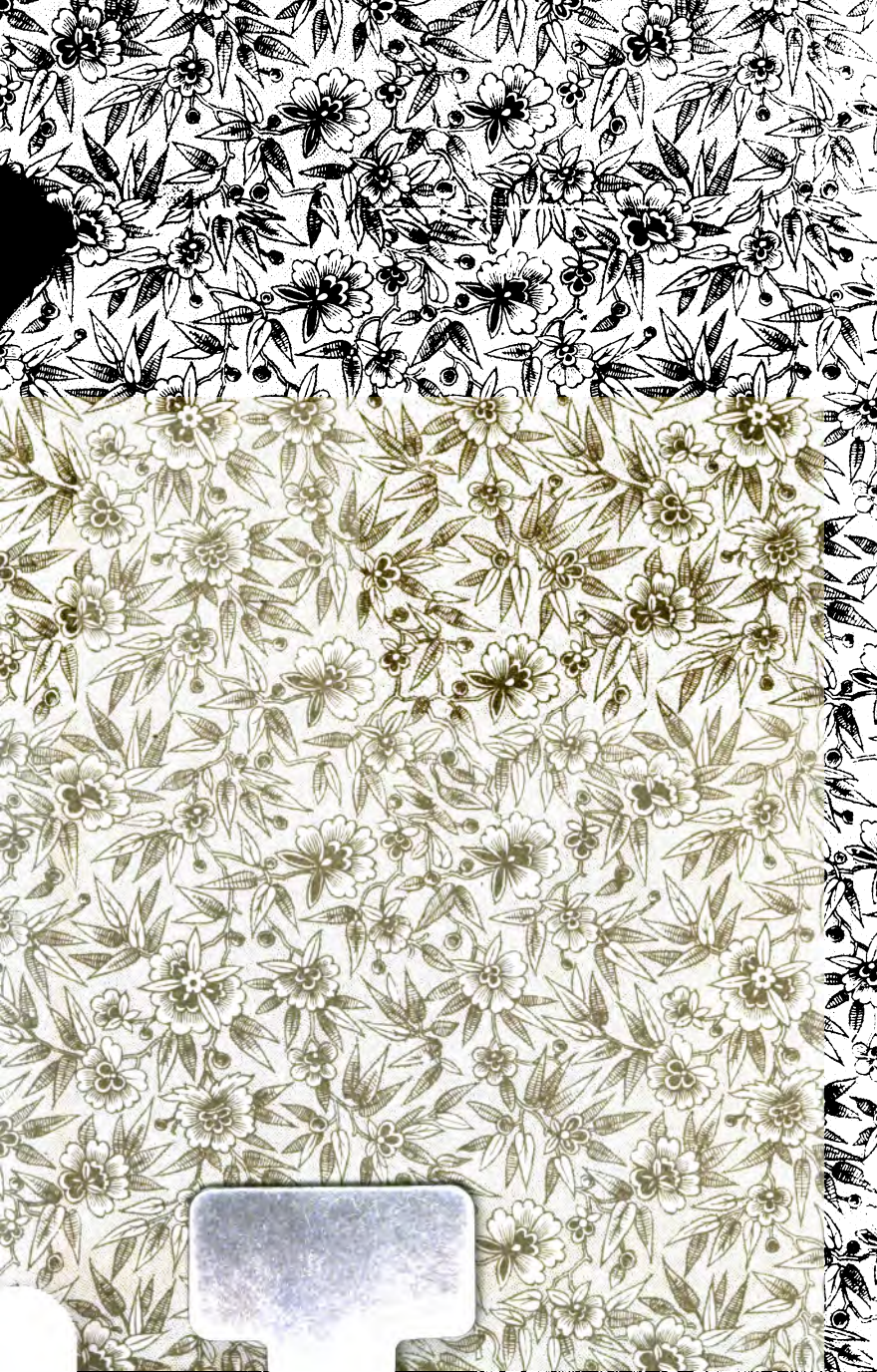

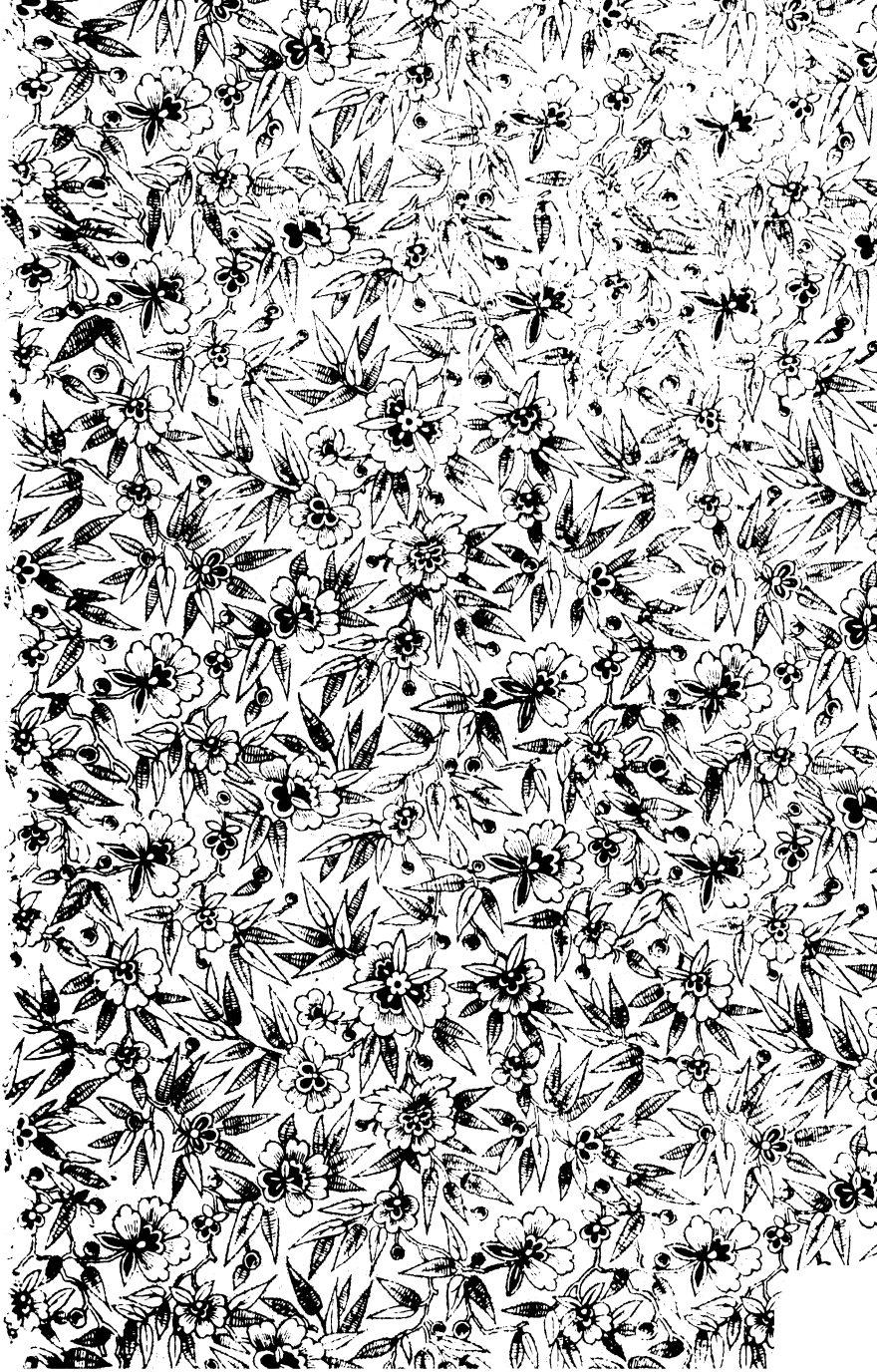

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BERNA BOYLE.

A Love Story of the County Down.

BY

MRS. J. H. RIDDELL,

AUTHOR OF "GEORGE GEITH," "THE SENIOR PARTNER," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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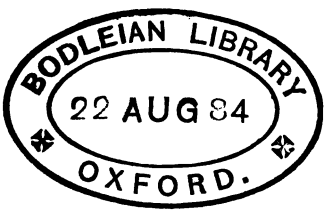
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BERNA BOYLE.

A Love Story of the County Down.

CHAPTER I.

Reverse the glass of the nineteenth century, let the sands of time sift swiftly backwards for nearly thirty-four years, and I will show you a tiny village nestling among the green slopes of Down.

But the merest hamlet! Spite of the railway station less than a mile distant; the post-office and public-house combined, situated just where the Comber Road branches off from the Newtonards; the smithy hard by; the church, perched aloft on one of those quaint low hills that have won for the county a not inapt comparison to a basket of eggs; the police barracks, the remarkable-looking Rectory, the mail-car running along

the highway twice a day, the Presbyterian meeting-house—surely, the smallest and most unpretending of picturesque villages!

Only one side to it, and that extremely imperfect! First a row of one-storied cottages, where dwelt the local cobbler and tailor, both deadly jealous of town ways and town notions. Then fields advanced boldly to the front, succeeded, after a short space, by the police barracks, a couple of its occupants, privates in the Irish constabulary, being generally encountered lounging on the footpath opposite. A little further, a few more cottages were scattered beside the road; at the extreme end of the village, beyond the lane which still winds up to the gate of the graveyard, stood proudly forth the shop, where nothing could be bought, it might have been supposed, that any human creature would desire to purchase. Close to the turning leading to the Rectory was a second smithy, for the neighbourhood was (and is) one much given to farming, and found constant need of a farrier's services; a few detached houses, farm and otherwise, lay back from the left-hand

side of the road—the right being skirted, as stated, by humble cottages; the whole place looked green and white by reason of the green fields and the white-washed houses. Up on the hillsides lay great masses of trees and belts of plantation, and higher still you could see roads winding over the heights whence lovely views were to be obtained of Belfast Lough, and the Antrim mountains, of Scrabo close at hand, and, on a clear day, a glimpse of Scotland—as the crow flies, little more than twenty miles distant from that extreme point of the county Down, close to which the English steamers plough their way, while, keeping between the Copelands and Donaghadee, they shape an almost direct course southward down the Channel.

It was a summer's morning in the July of 1850; the barley and the flax both needed sun; the potatoes, anxiously watched for signs of that fatal blight, could have borne any amount of heat and been the better for it. The grass had grown well and was more than ready for the scythe, and the rain was coming down in torrents. It was

a morning to make sad the heart of any farmer. All through the district, from the Rectory to the hovel, there was "mourning and lamentation and woe:" the labourers could not work; the horses were standing idle in the stable, eating their heads off. Masters and men, for once of one mind, looked mournfully out at the weather. Steadily the rain held on—dripping through the leaves, plashing into the pools, swelling the streams, soaking the earth. In the whole of that village there were no creatures happy but the ducks, which waddled about quacking, literally embarrassed by the wealth in the way of dirt Providence was providing for them.

About a mile out of the village, in the Craigantlet direction, which is the nearest route to Bangor—not on the crest of the rising ground, that opens to any one who has patiently toiled up the long incline such an unexpected and magnificent stretch of sea, and mountain, and headland, and smiling, restful land; but admirably placed on the slope of the hill, so as to be protected from the north-east wind—stood a house of

some pretension. It was embowered in trees. It was approached by an avenue upon which the foot fell almost as noiselessly as on the turf of the lawn. There was a great silence about the place. When you entered the gate the world seemed left behind. It was an old mansion—once the Dower House of a noble family—but it had descended in the social scale, till it simply "went with the land"—was thrown in as a mere makeweight with the farm. Scarcely charged for in the rent—the tenant was continually grumbling concerning the expense entailed upon him by the "tumble-down old barrack"—where ladies in stomachers and farthingales, and patches and high-heeled shoes, and powdered hair, once rustled through the wainscoted rooms; and handsome gallants came wooing, and dark deeds, it was said, were done—notably one which caused the imprint of a blood-stained hand on the wall, and the drip of blood on the black oak staircase; and the legend that now and then the ghost of a murdered woman might be seen by some human being more especially favoured than his fellows.

Through the years the house had been persistently falling from its once high estate. As the family to whom it belonged grew greater it grew less. Time went on, and the mansion, as the winters and summers came and went, got more and more dilapidated; each successive tenant refused it even one poor coat of paint; each occupier left it in worse plight than his predecessor. The ladies of the great family had long ceased to inhabit a nook so utterly out of the world. In London, or Bath, or Paris, or any other favourite resort, they spent the few pounds the Dower House brought them by way of rental. The memory of man could not extend to the time when a Dame Bountiful, residing under the shadow of those ancient trees, blessed the neighbourhood with her gracious presence.

The former days were gone, and the prestige of the old Dower House with them. It had sunk surely, if slowly. First it was let to a Newtonards man, who, having gone out to India without a penny, came back, to quote the countryside gossip, possessed of "millions and millions."

Unfortunately, he brought back in addition a native wife and half-a-dozen dark-skinned black-eyed children, all of whom, being regarded as intruders, and treated as such, the "rajah"—so his neighbours generally called him—sold off his furniture, packed up his belongings, and took boat for England. Then a sporting character, in great request at mess and bachelor dinners, who, it was credibly asserted, fought mains of cocks in the dining-room and had boxing matches in the great barn, remained in Ardilaw for the space of two years, at the expiration of which term he drank himself to death, greatly to the satisfaction of many worthy people. After that the place was let for the summer to persons able to drive across to Holywood "for the bathing." Then it went down another step, and was rented by a Belfast shopkeeper, who wanted country air for his children, and grass where those children could tumble about and grow up wild.

When it had been knocked almost out of human recognition by the young fry, their papa died; his business collapsed, and Ardilaw was

again in the market. This time a gentleman farmer thought he would essay a wrestle with the poor hillside land, and a contest with ignorance and the elements; but five successive bad seasons, to say nothing of relays of incompetent labourers and dishonest bailiffs, compelled his departure.

For a year and four months the house stood empty. Weeds grew rank in the orchard and kitchen garden, roses bloomed and faded in the parterres once tended by My Lady, moss covered the drive, the leaves lay where they had fallen on the lawn, from the windows no men or women's eyes looked out upon a landscape destitute of the attraction of human life and human movement. Some few persons came to view, but no one remained to rent. Then suddenly the whole village was astounded, and possibly shocked, to hear Hewson Muir, of Kilmoon Farm, had rented the Dower House—stock, lock, and barrel; land, water, wood, and bog—as tenant-at-will, under the great family, who "ought to have known better" than let the "old place to a man little more nor a labourer." Pre-

sumably the great family, like lesser families, understood its own business at least as well as its critics. It was a family which had its personal interests at heart, and always found a way, spite of settlements and entails, of getting rid of unremunerative and troublesome property. To cut a long story short, before Mr. Muir had been a year in possession, Ardilaw changed hands, and passed into the keeping of a certain Lyle Garnsey, commonly reported to be the "wickedest man in the county."

The sinister reputation of that gentleman who fought cocks in his dining-room, and hob-nobbed with the Heenan of his day, paled when contrasted against the scorching sins of Lyle Garnsey. In Mr. Garnsey's case distance lent enchantment to the view: what were a few cocks mangled and bleeding near Belfast in comparison with crimes committed in Dublin and London and "furrin parts"?

Over many a turf fire the misdoings of "the Squire" were spoken of with bated breath, the future of his only child, a daughter, discussed,

and his own eventual destination more than hinted at.

Between this new landlord and Mr. Muir the most friendly relations were soon established; though the former was almost an infidel and the latter a red-hot Orangeman, though one was a Liberal and the other a Tory, Mr. Muir sternly maintained "ye might chance to meet worse nor Lyle Garnsey," while Mr. Garnsey was wont to declare he considered "Mr. Muir a most excellent person." Twice a year, when he went to pay his rent, Mr. Muir dined at Beechfield, and it was a sight to behold him gravely accepting viands he did not like, served in a fashion to which he was not accustomed, from the hands of a footman who had much ado to conceal the disgust he felt at having to wait "upon such a fellow."

The years went by, and Mr. Muir, at all events, made money out of Ardilaw. If nobody else had ever managed to extract a profit from the land, Mr. Muir did. He rarely worked himself, but he was without peer in the matter of seeing that other people "wrought" as they should.

Sometimes he might have been seen guiding the plough, dressed in decent black, his coat a swallow-tail, and his shirt white as snow; but, as a rule, he preferred watching the turning up of the clods, and following while some one else harrowed and cast seed into the ground.

He was tall, over six feet in height—"six feet two in my stocking soles," he often stated—of spare habit, long limbed, loosely made, with no depth in his shoulders and no width across his chest; a man who looked as if he had been thrown together instead of built; a person no human being could have called handsome.

On that wet July morning he stood beside one of the windows in the old wainscoted dining-room, splicing the handle of a gig whip and looking out at the weather. It was indeed, as has been said, a day to try the faith of any farmer. Ordinarily, Mr. Muir—as became a man who hated the Pope, and loved "Protestant Boys," Orange Lilies, and the rousing cry of "No Surrender!"—had sufficient faith in the wisdom and justice of his Maker; but as he watched the rain coming down

faster and faster, the avenue getting wetter and wetter, the heavens growing darker and darker, he felt there must be something utterly wrong somewhere. Could it possibly have happened (trying circumstances will give rise to doubt even in minds not ordinarily prone to scepticism) that Providence, finding the whole scheme of creation too vast for individual attention, had given Ireland, as regarded its weather, over to a sort of Viceregent, who was making as great a mess of physical matters as Lord Lieutenants usually do of political?

This was a view of the question which in the then state of the hay crop seemed to Mr. Muir so extremely probable, he felt he should have liked to "threep" it out with "some sensible person;" but as there chanced to be no human being in the room except his eldest daughter "Bell," the farmer, though big with thought, decided he had best hold his tongue, "women folk being as a rule fools to talk to."

Miss Bell Muir was a lady who might have been guessed at any age, according to the fancy

of the spectator. Really but six-and-twenty, she had that hard and battered appearance it is competent for even quite young women to assume who have always cultivated the *utile* to the exclusion of the *dulce*. There was not much *dulce* about Miss Muir. She never could be considered happy except when half-killing herself, and harassing everybody about her, with a perfect plague of labour. Like her father, she loved to see other persons hard at work; unlike her father, nothing pleased her better than to work harder than them all. About the house she was a "besom of destruction." She thought it the height of bliss to spend hours in a hurricane of sweeping, scouring, bustling, grumbling, scolding. On those evil occasions the cats were harried from the hearth; the dogs, if they put their noses inside the kitchen door, were received with the contents of a pail of water; chanticleer, leading his wives across the threshold with great cur-a-rooing and much uplifting of his feet like a high-stepping horse, had to retrace his way at a different pace and in a different fashion; while

Mr. Muir himself was constantly asked "if he couldn't come into the house some different road nor across the wet flags."

Not a labourer on the farm but knew and detested Saturday—till the evening, that is to say—when Bell, refreshed and satisfied with the results of her campaign against the powers of dirt, either took to baking griddle-bread, which scented the whole neighbourhood with a sweet wholesome smell; or else, when one of her sisters offered to make "fadge," or wheaten or oaten cake, sat down to knit coarse stockings in a leisure so thoroughly earned.

On that particular wet morning in July, Miss Muir, occasionally looking at her father askance, the while a certain bright and brisk number seven needle glanced in and out of some fine white "shirting," was adorned in the fullest war-paint she had ever assumed when merely arming herself for domestic conflict.

It consisted of a clean and stiffly-starched print dress—colour, lilac; tone, dark; pattern, hideous; a calico apron, white as soft water and

grass-bleaching could make and keep it; a small woollen shawl, checked black and red, pinned securely across her bosom; and a linen cap, with two goffered borders made of the same uncompromising material, tied under her chin by a pair of linen strings about two inches wide, drawn into a cravat bow, framing her face till she looked like some sunburnt old baby.

This was Bell—the eldest female hope of Mr Muir's three matrimonial essays—this was Bell, secretly dreaded even by her stern papa, who had not "much opinion of any of the sex"—meaning the softer portion of creation—this was Bell, so famous through all the country-side for her powers of work and management, that many a man had cast sheep's eyes upon her, and would have proposed long enough before, but for the knowledge that Miss Muir had a high opinion of her value in the matrimonial market, and for a doubt as to the amount with which Mr. Muir meant to endow her.

"Carry's first steed in his stable," said many a canny father and mother, when discussing

matters over with sons anxious to better their position; "Carry and Robert 'll have the pick off Ardilaw. For all she's been to him, for all she's done for him, the old man hasn't the heart for Bell Muir he ought, considering there's not such a hand for butter in the county as hers."

It was the butter question Miss Muir was considering, while she sat "working on" a new shirt of her father's. Nevertheless, magnanimously ignoring her own anxieties, she essayed to converse with her parent as he stood beside the window commanding a comprehensive view of the village, the lawn, the trees, the drive, and the rain.

"Have you had any further word from Sam Dopp about the cottage?" she asked, her voice sounding much older and harsher than the voice of so young a woman had any right to sound.

"Ay—his brother came over yesterday between the lights, and said Sam would agree to rising the pound there was between us if I would put him up a pigstye; but I told him I would do no such thing; that if Sam wanted to keep

pigs he must do it some place else than at my cottage."

"Why, what ails you at the pigs, poor things? What would the Dopps do with all the leavings from so big a family without a pig to eat them up?"

"I don't know, and I don't care," answered Mr. Muir defiantly. "I'll neither have pigs rooting up the garden nor children destroying the clean papers and the fresh paint in the house. Mr. Orr made a sort of small paradise of the place, and if I can't get somebody that will keep it as it ought to be kept, why, it shall stay empty, that's all."

Miss Muir put in a few energetic stitches before she observed,

"You set great store by the cottage."

"And what would hinder me to set great store by it? Where could you find its like—a picture inside and out? I just stood and looked at it the other day, and thought the man did right well to call it Clear Stream. The birds were singing, and the flowers were all abloom,

and the air was scented with them, and the bit of grass was green as a fairy ring, and smooth and soft like the velvet in Miss Garnsey's mantilla, and the stream was running away under the plank bridge as hard as it could go, laughing back at the sun and making merry as it went; and the myrtle-tree was a sheet of blossom—it looked for all the world as if there had been a heavy snowstorm; and tufts of it were hanging so thick as to hide the polished green leaves—the very ground below the tree was white. I made up my mind at that minute Dopp and his swarm of children should never spoil what Mr. Orr spent such a lot of time and thought over."

"What are you going to do, then? Let it stop idle till the wet is running down the walls, and the garden is a wilderness, and you might stand up to your middle in the grass?"

Mr. Muir winced a little; he knew such things had happened before, and he saw no great cause to doubt such things might happen again; but still he replied with dogged determination,

"I have not wholly decided; only Dopp's not

going to be any tenant of mine, and I told John as much."

"Sam will be finely pleased when he hears the notion you have taken."

"I don't care whether he's pleased or displeased; and there's no reason that I'm aware of why I shouldn't have my way as well as another."

"You're right there; there is no reason at all."

"Still, there is no call why the house should stand empty, if that can be helped; so I've put an advertisement in the *News Letter* that Clear Stream Cottage, Dundonald, is to be rented by the year."

"The whole of Belfast will be running after it," commented Miss Muir, with a fine sneer.

"It may, but I hope it won't be on a day like this;" and, having got a confession off his mind which had been weighing upon it, Mr. Muir resumed his occupation; while Miss Muir, proceeding with her sewing, considered how she could "pay her father off for not letting the cottage to that decent man Sam Dopp."

"It's 'teeming' still," she began, seizing the

opportunity threading her needle afforded for changing her attitude and "looking fair" at the author of her being.

"An' the Lord alone knows when it intends to leave off," said Mr. Muir, so entirely suspending the business of splicing that the released length of string immediately uncoiled itself. "But what the deuce can ye expect when it rains on Sant Swethen's Day—Devil take him, whoever he was! He couldn't have been much of a Sant, in my opinion, or he'd have given a thought to honest folk trying to make an honest living between —— and the north-east wind, as somebody says."

"You don't believe in all that old story, I'm very sure, father," observed Miss Muir, who, like her surviving parent, had her own special form of scepticism.

"What would hinder me believing it? My father and my grandfather, and, I'm very sure, my great-grandfather before that, believed in St. Swethen's Day; and I never was one to fly in the face of my elders. Why wouldn't I—"

"It's just a legend got up by the Romans for their own ends," persisted the lady.

"Have your way in the matter, as I'm very sure you will," said Mr. Muir; "but ye can't deny it mostly does rain on the fifteenth of July, Old Style—"

"Ay, and it rains many an odd time besides," retorted Bell.

"Well, it's an ill wind blows nobody good. If it hadn't been for the wet, you and Carline and Sall would have had to do the churning among ye this morning."

"Me and Sall you mean; it's little help, but disturbance, we'd have got from Carline."

"What's the young officer doing with himself now he can't limp out to the lawn or down to the river?" asked Mr. Muir, discreetly changing the subject.

"He's just painting the beech-tree from the passage window; Carline carried him out a table, and set his things ready after breakfast; and as for limping, he can put his foot to the ground as well as either of us when he likes. I saw him

yesterday going up the stairs three at a time, but he didn't know I was near. If he had, it's holding on by the baluster he'd have been, and groaning with the pain."

Having completed which vivid outline, a vast deal more true to nature than any Ensign Ludham ever sketched, Miss Muir proceeded with her work, and left her father to fill in such details as pleased, or did not please, him at his leisure.

"It's just awful to look at yon rain," observed the farmer, when he had quite finished splicing the whip, and stood, idly twisting the lash round the handle, looking out at the steady downpour which bade fair ere long to swell the rivers, and bring a second curse of water over the land.

"It is that," agreed Miss Muir. "What a pity you would mow that grass in the long meadow! it'll every bit rot on the ground; I doubt if it'll even come in for litter."

"Ye've a pleasant way of putting things, my woman."

"Well, what I say's true. You wouldn't have me tell you a lie, would you?"

"I'm not just so sure it's always agreeable to hear the truth."

"We're not of the same way of thinking, then," observed Miss Muir, in a spirit of the sternest virtue.

"I don't know that, either, Bell. For instance, if one said you were a very ordinary sort of woman to look at, it wouldn't be a lie; but I doubt if you'd be best pleased, after all."

"I never did set up to be anything beyond the common," returned Miss Muir, with a sublime composure, though her father's remark cut her to the quick.

"Maybe it was just as well," retorted her father.

On hearing which remark, Miss Muir—Christian name Isabella—rose with great dignity, and, observing, "As you are in the mind to pay me such fine compliments, I think I'll go and print the butter; my hands are cool now," left the room.

"Your hands may be cool," soliloquised Mr. Muir, "but your temper isn't." An idea appar-

ently so comforting that though, looking at the sodden earth, he again anathematised the good St. Swithin, it was not with half the fervour which distinguished his previous utterances.

CHAPTER II.

A DELUGE of summer rain was sweeping the Belfast streets clean. Dawn had appeared, clad in delicate gray wrappings of sad misty cloud, and it is only fair to say the fulfilment of day did not belie the promise of morn. The sun remained resolutely ought of sight, the heavens were leaden, the earth was sodden; Devis, the Cave Hill, and the Black Mountain had not merely "put their nightcaps on," but retired altogether from view.

A good stream, swift as a mountain torrent, was running down each filthy gutter. On Lettuce and Carrick Hills rosy, curly-headed, barefooted children were in the turbid water which rushed to flush the sewers, disporting themselves like ducklings. Upon the Crumlin Road, past the Courthouse, where Justice—her eyes bandaged with a stone fillet—sits high aloft, holding her scales, utterly crooked, car-drivers, with shout and whip,

urged fast horses recklessly; Hercules Street, then lined with butchers' shops, was foul with garbage, borne onward to the gullies; in Sandy Row peace reigned; the weather was so bad the Orangemen had not a thought to spare for their friend Pious William or their foe the Pope; at the Docks wretchedness unspeakable prevailed, miserable cattle awaiting shipment were penned together in sheds open to wind and rain; in the air there was that raw, moist chilliness which makes the Irish climate so trying; the Lough resembled a sea of liquid mud, where white-crested billows tossed restlessly; the soft green slopes of Down and the bold scenery of Antrim were alike impartially hidden from mortal eye. Belfast was looking its worst—and that worst can be very bad indeed—on the dreary summer's morning when Mr. Muir stood splicing the handle of his whip and contemplating the pouring rain, and thinking of his rotting hay, and saying injurious things concerning St. Swithin.

In a room on the first floor of Cunningham's Hotel, which commanded the spectacle of York

and Donegall Streets being swept by "sheets" of rain, sat two ladies dressed in deep mourning. Not the slightest likeness could be traced between them, yet they stood in the relation of mother and daughter. The latter was tall; her complexion pale, with the delicate creamy pallor of Mary's lilies; her eyes large, liquid, and of that dark deep blue rarely seen out of Ireland, shaded with long brown lashes that would have made them at times look black, had it not been for their tender melting softness; her face was of the truest shape of Irish beauty, narrowing somewhat to a perfect chin. (Those of my readers who have seen at Hardwicke Castle the portrait of that famous lady, Georgina Duchess of Devonshire, will understand what I mean.) Her forehead was broad, not high; her nose short, straight, and decided; her upper lip short also, and perhaps a trifle scornful, telling of a latent pride which might have been fully developed in her character had circumstances proved propitious; her mouth —but ah, how can I—with the mists of years rising between that frank sweet mouth, with its

thousand suggested loves and griefs, and to-day—hope, through the cold, hard medium of pen and ink, to do justice to that most exquisite mouth! The light and shadows playing at hide-and-seek on a hillside, or chasing each other over the water, or coming and going, flickering and changing on the turf through a tracery of green leaves, could not have told more surely the story of cloud and sunshine than did the sweet lips and the sensitive curves reveal, to an understanding eye, the joy or the trouble agitating the girl's young heart. For though she had known bitter sorrow, and shed those salt tears wrung from the deepest depths of human suffering, the anguish of which can never be quite forgotten during the happiest after experience, she was still young—little more than seventeen—with only her face for her fortune, a face which, in the opinion of her mother, could by the most partial individual only be considered a most contemptible dowry.

Twenty years previously Mrs. Boyle's beauty had been of the pink shepherdess type; what it was on that wet morning when, after an absence

long as the period of her married life, she sat looking at the dreary vista of York Street, swept by driving rain, might have tried the courtesy of her old admirers to say. Under the most favourable circumstances it is a style too apt to fade, and certainly the widow had faded a good deal. The delicate rose-pink of her earlier womanhood having left her cheeks, and settled in the tip of her nose, gave to that feature a somewhat exasperating prominence not originally contemplated by Nature; her eyes, once "blue as harebells," had, with twenty years' hard wear, become, as regards the iris, well-nigh colourless; there were at the corners of her mouth and across her forehead suspicious lines, strange to see in a woman who professed to have got only half-way through the seventy years allotted to man. For thirty-five she looked extremely old; but then some persons, many persons, do look older than their actual age. Besides, she might have made a mistake concerning the date of her birth. It is only charitable to suppose she was eternally making mistakes on this subject, since, while that awkward entry in

the baptismal registry showed a steady tendency to advance, the years to which she owned exhibited an even greater decision in the matter of retrogression.

Her figure was light and trim as in the days when she never lacked partners at the great Dublin parties so often referred to in the paternal home near Ballyclare; or when, in the Belfast streets, she was viewed and admired afar; and many men would have proposed to a girl who fulfilled their idea of feminine loveliness, had they been sure of the fortune with which her father—an exceedingly vulgar attorney, in rather shady practice—meant to endow his charming daughter.

The deep crape she wore "out of compliment" to her dead husband was almost new, yet already she had begun to consider his possible successor. Belfast having been the scene of her earliest conquests, she felt an assured conviction the moment Bridge Street and Donegall Place knew her once more, fresh victories would follow.

Twenty years' daily association with persons

well born, well educated, well mannered, and well cultured had failed to refine Mrs. Boyle's accent or tone of thought. Good books might never have been written, good music never composed, good pictures never painted, high aspirations never conceived, for all contact with them had done for her.

In every essential, save appearance, she was still the Milly Vince who had, between the years of grace 1820 and 1830, laughed and coquetted and giggled, and, in her own exhaustive phraseology, "put her best foot foremost," till, at the mature age of nine-and-twenty, she snared, by means of her "endearing young charms," the susceptible heart of Ulick Boyle. Whether those charms alone would have ever carried the affair beyond the confines of flirtation is open to doubt; but backed by a stern parent, who, declaring he did not mean to stand any shilly-shallying, threatened an action for "breach," they proved irresistible. Some women might have felt a delicacy about marrying when the man had to be brought to church only by dint of a legal pistol held at his

ear. But the fair Milly, spite of her pink-and-white complexion and blue eyes, and fragile person and little affectations of timidity, did not allow any scruples of that sort to come between her and happiness. "Though, indeed, taking Ulick Boyle was the worst day's work I ever did," she had said not less than three hundred and sixty-five times a year during the course of her married life. "I often wonder he has the face to look at me, deceiving a girl as he did. If my poor father hadn't thought he was just rolling in riches he'd never have let me said a word to him;" which was, indeed, a most unjust libel on the excellent sense of that astute individual.

"I wonder if Richard's never coming," began Mrs. Boyle, after vainly craning her head so as to try to obtain a glimpse of the open door below. "I am tired out waiting for him."

"It is not twelve yet, mamma," answered Miss Boyle; "and Mr. Vince's note said he could not possibly call before noon."

"There you go with your mammas, and your noons, and your Mr. Vinces. Why can't you

talk plain English, and speak as I do? and if I've told you once I've told you a hundred times not to be calling me 'mamma, mamma, mamma,' for ever and ever. What's the good of setting people wondering to see a young woman like myself with a great maypole of a girl by my side? I can't be telling every stranger I was married at fifteen, and indeed before."

"I am very sorry," murmured the "maypole." "I forgot."

"You forgot, indeed! it's always forgot, forgot, forgot with you. If I forgot as you do I wonder what would become of us. It's well I have head enough for a dozen; and that minds me, I'm fairly starving with the hunger. Fetch down that bone of the turkey. I had scarcely a bite at breakfast. I've got bread I cut before the waiter came up to take the things away. You'd never have thought of doing that, I'll be bound."

"I do not think I should," answered Miss Boyle.

"You won't do much good in the world if

you do not keep your wits about you. There never was a Vince yet hadn't more than his share. Put them where you like they're sure to light on their feet. Now run up-stairs and fetch that morsel of food. I'm fit to faint. What are you waiting for? You've got the key of the box."

"Do you think it would be well to bring it down just now? Supposing Mr. Vince came—"

"Well, supposing he did? The man is aware we must eat sometimes—though it's little enough contents me, goodness knows; and don't anger me by calling him Mr. Vince. He was christened Richard, and nobody I ever heard of, except my father, shortened the name to Dick."

"But I really could not—"

"Why couldn't you? What would hinder you?"

"It would seem such a liberty."

"Liberty, indeed!" repeated Mrs. Boyle, with a sarcastic laugh. "Liberty! and Richard Vince my own father's brother's son!"

"Yes; but I have never seen him, and he must be years older than I am, and—"

"O! get along with you, do; never let me hear you talking folly like that again; and don't be putting affronts on my relations, who are the only people now able and willing to help us. Where would you be at this minute, I should be glad to know, if it wasn't for my cousin Richard?"

Judging from the expression of Miss Boyle's face, she would have preferred almost any other place to that precise portion of the earth where she stood, through no wish or fault of her own.

"Shall I get the turkey?" she inquired, in the tone of a person who did not much relish the commission.

"*Shall* you get the turkey?" repeated the widow, with withering scorn. "Yes, you will get the turkey, if you don't want to see me drop down with exhaustion; and when you come back shoot the bolt, that Richard mayn't catch us. Now make haste, and don't let me have to speak to you again."

Facing the inevitable as if it had been a tiger, Miss Boyle braced her courage for the event, and

proceeded in search of the remains of that wretched bird, for twenty-four hours previously the cause of much care and trouble. Less diplomacy has served to annex a state or cede a territory than was rendered necessary by Mrs. Boyle's determination at once to eat fowl and yet keep it out of the hotel bills.

Her daughter could not have touched a morsel of the creature had even great interests depended on her doing so; while the widow considered it the correct thing largely to partake of the delicacy. Most of the bird was gone—indeed, the whole of it, except one leg of goodly proportions, and Mrs. Boyle had herself consumed the whole, save the bones, which she in an unpretending and primitive manner picked very bare indeed.

"Do have a bit, Berna," she hospitably entreated, unfolding a newspaper wrapping up the bird, and spreading it like a tablecloth over her knees. "It's a beautiful turkey, and we needn't be leaving any of it over. We'll be in clover now we are here. Richard 'll see to us. I wouldn't wonder if he took us straight off in a covered car

to Craigvallen. I've told you before he has a place there just a very sight for beauty, lawns as smooth as velvet, flowers the scent of which is enough to take away your breath; fishponds, as if there were not fish of all sorts and to spare in the Lough. You've heard talk of Carrick oysters; you'll taste them now. O, there are grand times in store for you if only you won't be turning your back on good luck, as your father was so fond of doing! Well, as I was telling you about Craigvallen, there's not a tree or shrub you could name but's in the grounds. They're just for all the world, as far as I can understand, like the garden of Eden, only Richard has no wild beasts. Why don't you eat, girl, and get some colour in your cheeks? I'm sure I dread my relations seeing you—they'll say you can be no child of mine. But that you're well grown—though you're slight and useless as a willow wand—I'd think the fairies had changed you in your cradle. There now, take that away; why don't you heed what I say, and your cousin's foot on the stair? For goodness' sake, Berna, put the bone somewhere

—anywhere; and, stop a minute; is my hair smooth? O this cap—this cap, that makes the best of looking women frights, weary on it, and just when I was wanting to be at my best, too! Do you mean to open that door to-day? Don't you know the man's bruising his knuckles rapping? and all the Vinces had nice hands.—I'm so sorry, Richard, you were kept waiting. There's something wrong with the catch, I think;" and uttering this huge falsehood, Mrs. Boyle, simpering coquettishly, ambled up to her cousin and presented her hand for his acceptance, a kindness she would have supplemented with the addition of her cheek, but that Mr. Vince looked so unlikely a person to feel grateful for such an attention, the delicate idea was nipped in the bud.

"And so here's yourself at last," said the widow, in a light and sportive manner. "How are you?"

With grave deliberation Mr. Vince intimated he was pretty well; he considered the weather trying, but, upon the whole, he felt thankful to say he could give a tolerably good report of his health.

"I wish I could say as much," sighed Mrs. Boyle, with a downward glance at her crape: "I have had so much to go through, I wonder I'm alive."

"I was very sorry indeed to hear of your loss," said Mr. Vince—he had previously written to state as much, and he now most heartily wished that rash proceeding could be undone.

"You needn't tell me you were sorry," cried the widow effusively; "all my family had feeling hearts. O, this is Berna—*his* daughter, you know! You did not see her when you were with us."

No, Mr. Vince had not seen the young person thus introduced; and something in his tone, and the way he shook hands, conveyed the idea that if he had not seen her then he could have survived the disappointment.

"I was greatly surprised to find you were in Belfast," he remarked to Mrs. Boyle after these amenities, at the same time, in compliance with that lady's earnest entreaties, "sitting down off his feet."

"And where else could we come except to Belfast?" asked the widow.

"Rather a difficult question to answer off-hand; but I should have thought there were many places more agreeable and attractive."

"My own notion," retorted Mrs. Boyle, "is, no place is so pleasant as among your own people, if you are rich; and I don't consider any place can be so suitable if you are poor."

"I trust the latter is not your case," said Mr. Vince, who was becoming seriously uneasy.

"Why, don't you know?—haven't you heard?"

"Certainly not; how should I know or hear?"

"I made sure somebody had told you I was thrown on the world without a sixpence. As I said to Berna when your letter came, apologising for not attending the funeral, and trusting I would write if you could be of any assistance, 'Now, that's the Vinces all over—they're never behind when any friend is sick or sorry.'."

To judge from the expression of Mr. Vince's

grim face, no man ever lived less desirous of playing the part of "Good Samaritan."

"I scarcely understand," he remarked, ignoring the inferred compliment to his own excellent qualities. "Do you mean that Mr. Boyle made no provision for you in the event of his death?"

"That's just what I do mean—and I don't wonder at your being indignant at the way I've been treated. If I'd only known—but there's no use fretting over spilt milk; and nobody can deny it's spilt milk for me to be left a widow with a great girl to keep, on a paltry sixty pounds a year."

"But I thought you said you had nothing?"

"And what's sixty pounds?"

"Over twenty-three shillings a week—"

"Just about enough to buy boot-laces—"

"I think you could scarcely spend twenty-three shillings a week on boot-laces," remonstrated Mr. Vince, with the most absurd and anxious gravity. "Many persons live on less."

"And I wouldn't have had even that pittance if it hadn't been for my father," explained Mrs.

Boyle, who felt the aspect of affairs was getting serious; "he insisted—O, he knew the nature of the man I was marrying!—that Ulick should insure his life. He didn't want to do anything of the sort, and he wouldn't put his money like another person in the office the old man recommended. No. The 'Scottish Widows' was the only thing that took his fancy.

'It seems to me, Boyle,' said my father—you know he always would have his joke—'you might just as well put your premiums at the back of the fire. I don't know about Scottish widows, but I don't think an Irish widow would stop one long.' It was just a harmless piece of fun, but Ulick sulked for a week about it."

Involuntarily Mr. Vince turned towards the sofa where Berna sat, leaning against the cushion she knew concealed the bare thigh-bone of that horrible bird. He fancied she had spoken; but she was utterly still, her head turned towards the window, her hands clasped tight together in her lap.

"I do not suppose the question of marriage

would affect your annuity," he remarked; beyond all other things Mr. Vince was practical—"business to the backbone" declared his admirers.

"O, it is not of myself I'm thinking!" explained Mrs. Boyle; "it's that girl. What would become of her if I was taken—and as the Holy Bible truly says, 'In the midst of life we're in death'—I can't imagine; she hasn't a bit of pluck in her."

"Do not trouble yourself about me, mamma," entreated Miss Boyle, again forgetful of the maternal mandate.

"It's all very well to say don't trouble, but how am I to help troubling? If you can tell me that, I'll be very much obliged to you."

"Will not your husband's grandmother?—I always thought—" hesitated Mr. Vince, finding the girl seemed unable or unwilling to solve the conundrum proposed.

"And you thought right enough," said Mrs. Boyle; "the old lady is just rolling in wealth. She has her servants, and her carriages, and her fine house, and her gold, and her silver, and her

plate, and her jewels; and is wrapped up in her money, when she ought to be considering her sinful soul, and how soon she'll have to appear before her Maker. And Berna had the finest chance ever was of coming in for the whole of it. I declare when I think of her foolishness I could sit down and cry my eyes out. When she wanted a day or two of sixteen she had her choice. All the Dowager asked her to do was to give up her home and me and be made for life; and she wouldn't. As if I hadn't trouble enough without her making more for me."

"But, surely, you cannot find fault with your daughter because she refused to give up her mother," expostulated Mr. Vince, who felt, however extraordinary Miss Boyle's preference might be, it was one he ought to commend.

"I'm not finding fault with her for that; as I told her, where would you find a mother like me?"

Mr. Vince was about as destitute of all sense of humour as an Irishman ever can be. Yet Mrs. Boyle's question tickled his fancy to such a degree he could not avoid smiling as he said,

"There is a good deal in that, to be sure."

"There's everything," answered the widow; "and for that reason she ought to have taken advice, and been led by one a little older and ever so much wiser than herself. But she's her father's daughter all over—looks and nature—headstrong as he was. If he'd only listened to me he might have been spared to see whether there was nothing he could for us; but he never thought of anybody but himself—"

"Mamma!" interposed Berna.

"You needn't fire up. I'm not speaking against him. Only if he hadn't, just for contrariness, ridden that chestnut—"

"Really, I do think, Mrs. Boyle—"

"And you call me Mrs. Boyle—me, your father's brother's own child—what'll become of us!—and I made sure you'd be as glad to see me as my husband was you. Why, if I'd let him, he'd have turned the house out of window to do you honour, he was that pleased to see one belonging to me inside his doors. Not ten minutes ago I was saying to Berna, Richard 'll be ordering

an inside car and taking us straight off to Craigvallen, and showing us his grand place, and making us acquainted with his fine wife."

The peril was so imminent, Mr. Vince felt he dare not lose a moment.

"I am excessively sorry," he said, "but it's quite impossible I should ask you to my house. Mrs. Vince would not hear of such a thing for a moment."

For about the space of time it could have taken any one to count five, Mrs. Boyle remained gazing at her kinsman with wild incredulity, then exclaiming, "And here am I stranded on the faith of what you'd do for me," she burst into a perfectly real and unaffected passion of tears.

"Mamma, mamma!" cried Berna, and, forgetful of the dreadful thing wrapped up in newspaper buried beneath the sofa pillow, she hurriedly crossed the room, and, kneeling on the carpet, threw her arms around a mother whose "like" she would, happily, have found it difficult to find.

CHAPTER III.

Mr. Richard C. Vince was a gentleman "universally respected." In other words, he had done remarkably well.

"By dint of indefatigable industry and an extraordinary aptitude for business"—*vide* the local papers when on one occasion it became expedient for them to laud their respected fellow-townsman—"he had raised himself from comparative obscurity to the topmost rung of the commercial ladder. Men such as he had made Ulster what it was. Men such as he would preserve Ulster as it was. So long as men of the stamp of Richard Charles Vince remained in their midst," editors felt there "could be no reason to despair of the future of Ireland." "Public spirit, private charity, a generosity as unstinted as unfailing," were all united in the person of Mr. Vince; and when that good man and true gave a fête and threw his grounds open

to the masses, on the "never-to-be-forgotten occasion" of his entering into possession of Craigvallen, a correspondent of the *Lagan Flying Post* actually drivelled while shedding inky tears over the wealth and virtues of Richard Charles.

If there were persons who, in narrow town houses and small suburban villas, said Mr. Vince had on occasion sailed remarkably near the wind, the observation proved nothing, except that they were poor and non-successful. All great men have their detractors; and, in his way, Mr. Vince was a very great man indeed.

Whatever the course he sailed may have been, it enabled him to arrive in port with a rich cargo. When first he took his seat on a stool in the office of Messrs. Hughes, the great corn merchants, his weekly stipend only amounted to five shillings; and less than thirty years later he was in a position to buy Craigvallen from Sir Humphrey Trevane, Baronet, and to marry Marcella Robina, third daughter of the late Theophilus Carpenter, Esq., of Cherryfield, a gentleman who travelled the road to ruin in a coach-and-four.

It was this lady, popular opinion believed, who "turned" Richard Charles from Presbyterianism to the "Establishment;" but that estimable man's enemies sneeringly said he was glad enough to go the way he wanted under shelter of a woman's petticoats.

The Rev. Dr. Cooke—affectionately nicknamed "the Cock of the North"—declared that "when people got rich enough to set up a jaunting-car, they ceased walking to meeting and drove to church."

Mr. Vince's conversion was delayed till after the purchase of a carriage-and-pair. If he could have combined the society of great persons and the Westminster Confession of Faith, it is possible he might never have left his old religion; but it was easier to step from church into the grand houses, the doors of which were opened for him and his wife; and he retained the good word and will of the Presbyterians by benefactions which they styled "princely," and deeds properly described as "worthy."

His life was, indeed, spent in "conciliating"

—irreverent persons said something about Vince trying to hedge for this world and the next, and quoted that text which warns a person to fear when all men speak well of him; but there can be no question Mr. Vince did an enormous amount of good, and charity is a gift-horse that certainly ought not to be looked too closely in the mouth.

Sprung almost from the people himself, his greatest pride was to associate with those vaguely designated by the lower orders in Ireland "the quality." He did like a man able to trace a long line of aristocratic ancestors. Ulick Boyle, of Boyle Court, county Mayo, had always been a great feather in his cap; and when he wrote to his cousin, whom he had never, even in his youngest and her best days, either liked or admired, offering his condolences on the death of a man descended not merely from an old but a wealthy stock, he was perfectly sincere in saying, if he could take any trouble off her hands she might command his services. What he meant was that as the Boyles had property in

the county Down he could see to anything connected with it for her; the idea that she would come rushing to Belfast herself never entered his mind. The imagination of woman is, however, quicker than that of man; and the moment Mrs. Vince heard of Mrs. Boyle's advent, she said, "She has come intending to plant herself on us for a long visit."

"Then her expectations will be disappointed," thought Mr. Vince, but he possessed his soul in silence.

He had known his cousin Milly as maid and matron, and he did not wish his wife to know her as a widow. He had seen her giggling, flirting, coquetting with many sorts and conditions of men; and he secretly determined the sacred threshold of Craigvallen, once inhabited by "the best in the county," should not be crossed by her profane feet. Without ever actually turning a cold shoulder to the whole dreadful Vince connection, he had managed to keep his many, many relations at arm's length. He helped, advised, and occasionally found money for them; but they

thoroughly understood such benefits were not to be presumed upon, or made the excuse for any "hail, fellow, well met" sort of familiarity. Richard Charles was Mr. Vince to them all round; indeed, Richard Charles was Mr. Vince to most persons except Mrs. Vince, who, considering formality between man and wife bad form, called him Richard from the day she consented to be his.

"I am very sorry, Mrs. Boyle," he began, a little awkwardly, for the spectacle of Ulick Boyle's widow dissolved in tears, and the sight of Ulick Boyle's generous heart looking at him through the dead man's daughter's eyes, seemed for the moment rather more than he could bear.

"No, Richard Vince, you are not sorry," sobbed Mrs. Boyle; "and it is no use your sitting there and telling me what you know is not true. All you want is to give me the cut go-by; and you ought to be ashamed of yourself, sitting there calling your first cousin on the father's side Mrs. Boyle. But it is just what I might have expected; when poverty comes in

at the door, friends jump out of the window. They do, as if it was a fire. Get up, Berna; don't be kneeling there, spoiling your crape on the dusty carpet; you'll have to be careful of your clothes, for dear only knows when you'll get any more."

"It is a very hard position," ventured Mr. Vince, who felt it was exceedingly hard for him; "but if you would only look it sensibly in the face, we—"

"Talk's cheap," interrupted the widow. "From a boy you'd always a gift of the gab. No, it's no use, Berna; I'll just say out what's in my mind, and then if I'm no richer I'll be easier—for goodness' sake, girl, let go hold of my arm, you'll have it black and blue, pinching it like that; you know a fair skin like mine marks in a minute."

"I assure you—" tried Mr. Vince, in vain expostulation.

"I tell you it's no manner of use thinking to deceive me. I have known you all my life, and I never knew much good of you; and it is a

burning shame for you to treat your own full-blood cousin, whose father gave you the first shove you ever had from shore, as if she was dirt under your feet, not fit to be spoken to. I wouldn't be as unkind to a dog as you have been to me; and after me always sticking up for my own family too. I never said an ill word about one of the Vinces. Did I, Berna?"

"I never heard you, mamma," agreed Berna, who had, after that little misfortune in regard to her mother's "fair skin," risen from the floor and resumed her seat beside the turkey's thigh-bone.

"There now, you hear what she says? You mightn't take my word, but you can't be off believing her. Not but what I could have found plenty bad to tell if I'd liked to tell it. I haven't forgot how your father took Cripple's Farm over the head of that quiet decent woman, Tom Dunnan's widow; ay, and sure enough he hadn't a day's luck after it, and maybe your luck, Richard, may turn yet. And I mind me how Tim Vince—that's your uncle and mine, you know—cheated young Craig over the black mare he sold him at

Straid, and how if it hadn't been for my father, whose daughter you think so little of—"

"If you have the slightest influence over your mother," said Mr. Vince, addressing Berna, and drowning the final portion of Mrs. Boyle's denunciation with his harsh deep tones, "will you advise her to cease this crazy rambling, and let us discuss her future plans in a reasonable spirit?"

The sneer with which his kinswoman greeted a suggestion, by no means ridiculous, amounted to a snort. Construing the words of Richard Charles into a sign of weakness, she determined to have another round, and accordingly recommenced.

"It'll be a fine story for me to tell Matilda Sheill, and the rest of them, how, not content with turning up your nose at me yourself, you tried to set my own child against her mother. She was self-willed enough, goodness knows, before. I don't know what she'll be like now she's got the master of Craigvallen and the husband of old Theoph. Carpenter's daughter to back her up in her undutiful ways."

"O mamma, I'm not undutiful; indeed, indeed, I am not!" said the girl.

"And lest I should, for the second time, prove inadvertently the cause of arousing your resentment against a young lady I most sincerely pity, I will bid you good-morning," remarked Mr. Vince, in his best and most stately manner.

"You're not going off in that way!" cried Mrs. Boyle, jumping up as she saw Richard Charles advancing to shake hands with her daughter, whose eyes were swimming in tears. "You're never going to leave me, without a friend in the world I can turn to, and with a child who hasn't the faintest chance of making a good match and setting us all up again! I didn't mean to anger you. I wouldn't give 'Tilda Sheill, or one of them, the satisfaction of saying, 'The Vinces have been at it again. It's Milly and Richard aren't on speaking terms now.'"

"I am afraid, if your friend Miss Sheill confines herself to the truth, that is precisely what she will have to say," retorted Mr. Vince.

"Don't go!" entreated the widow; "don't go

for any sake, and don't be vexed with me. Sure that was only my fun about Craigvallen. I wouldn't be paid to drive out there—tiring myself looking at things that can never do me any good. All I want is a roof to cover my head and put my boxes under. I was thinking we, maybe, might get some quiet lodging at Mount Pottinger, or along the Botanic Road. I don't care what it is like, so that we can just turn ourselves round."

Instantly there arose before Mr. Vince's mind a vision of the fascinating Milly, as he remembered her in that evil time departed, ere Mr. Ulick Boyle at one and the same moment tied such a millstone round his own neck and relieved the Vince connection from the burden of a woman who had rendered the lives of all her relations a weariness and a terror.

He could see again her veil floating in the wind, her scarf dropping off her shoulders, her unduly short and scanty skirts, beneath which sandalled shoes and "clocked" open-work stockings were as much in evidence as her pink cheeks and golden curls, and "heavenly" blue eyes

under the brim of the enormous bonnets in vogue when she was in her teens, and long after. She knew a family resident in the Shankhill Road, and from the fastnesses of that locality she was wont to make desperate descents on the youth and manhood of Belfast.

Twenty times a day she was to be seen in company with two or three girls of her acquaintance passing and repassing the news-room. Hercules Street, High Street, Bridge Street, Donegall Street, North Street, Rosemary Street, and High Street again, that was the usual round of the charming damsels, with occasional forays along Donegall Place and a rush for raspberry-puffs into the Corn Market and Kitty Linden's, from whence a strategic movement was often made into Ann Street, in order to see whether any fresh supplies could be wrung from papa.

And now she was a widow, and the world had gone on; and poor Mr. Vince, compelled constantly to frequent all these places of public resort, thought how awful it would be to meet a streaming crape veil, and a voluminous black

shawl, and that little lithe figure, and that washed-out complexion at high noon "where men do congregate."

He could not do it. Life would not be worth having. He must make some terms with her; money was no object in comparison to getting rid of Mrs. Boyle.

"There are many places," he began, "where living is so much cheaper than in a large town, that—"

"No, thank you," interrupted the widow; "it was bad enough when there was plenty and to spare, where we'd be a month at a time without a soul, besides beggars coming to the house, except the priest and the rector; and now I'm in a manner destitute, I don't mean to settle myself down where there's not a creature to speak to, and not a thing to see but bog and the Atlantic."

"Then why not go to Dublin—"

"Why not go to New York?"

"Why should you not?" asked Mr. Vince eagerly, too eagerly by far.

"For the same good reason I'm not going to

Dublin. What would become of me, where I don't know man, woman, or child? No, I've friends here, and here I mean to stay; and whenever it clears up a bit I'll put on my bonnet and call on a few I know, and maybe they'll put me in the way of getting a couple of cheap rooms, for an hotel is ruin; there's no other name for it."

"My time is valuable, and as I cannot possibly assist you in your search for lodgings, I will bid you good-bye," said Mr. Vince, with great decision.

"Well, you have the temper!" exclaimed Mrs. Boyle. "I wouldn't own one like it for all the money in the Bank of Ireland; ay, that's the way your father went off the morning—" But her words fell only on Berna's unwilling ears—Mr. Vince, in despair, had left the room, and was half-way down-stairs. The widow was too much for him. What sin could he have committed to call down this judgment? He had been too prosperous, too much uplifted; he had gone once to a Catholic church in Paris; he had discharged a clerk in anger, and refused to give him a

character, and he believed that man was now in the workhouse.

He would see what he could do for him; he would try to get into Parliament, and move Heaven and earth, to rush a bill through the House doing away with all relationships except those of man and wife, parent and child. He knew he could make a telling speech on such a subject. It was awful, it was most unjust, that a man like himself, who had worked hard all his life, and been reasonable, and made the name of Vince respected and respectable, should, now he was past fifty, have such a cousin as Mrs. Boyle planted down in his locality. It was horrible. Even in a nightmare he had never suffered such agonies, and all because he would not ask her to Craigvallen. He felt he should prefer, if it came to that point, to sell Craigvallen and go abroad, rather than have the dread and fear of his cousin Milly on his mind. That day all things went wrong with Mr. Vince. If the ever-vernal Milly had come into Belfast with sound of trumpet and beat of drum and proclamation of herald he could

not more utterly have been possessed by the feeling that the whole Corporation was aware of the fact the charming widow was stopping in Cunningham's Hotel. It would not be long—at all events, his reason told him so—before half the town was aware of her presence.

He had boasted about the Boyle connection; he had talked familiarly concerning the view from Boyle Court; the speed and stay of Mr. Boyle's hunters, the number of acres he owned, his shore and mountain rights, his tenants, his grandmother, his second cousin, Sir Herbert Boyle, who, having done great deeds out in Afghanistan, was knighted by her gracious Majesty Queen Victoria; and now here was the widow of that same Mr. Ulick Boyle back again in Ulster, lacking a penny, figuratively speaking, to bless herself with, and by far a greater fool—so it seemed to the unhappy merchant—than before her marriage.

Richard Charles felt that altogether the humiliation was more than he could bear; the business salt even lost its savour, and there seemed nothing left wherewith the desert of his

life could be fertilised. As for blossoming like the rose, that was now impossible. Never—never since Good Fortune (seeing what a nice, steady, sanctimonious, utterly respectable young man had come up from Ballynure) adopted him for her own—did a sensation of more utter wretchedness paralyse all his energies. Irritable himself, he was the cause of irritability in others. "The weather had got into his temper," the clerks declared; and then they cursed the weather in a most improper manner, and made the office-boys scapegoats on whom they laid all manner of crimes and shortcomings, and drove them out into the rain without compunction, as, of old, the Israelites cheerfully sent the sin-laden beast over the burning sands of that terrible wilderness their own feet had trodden.

"You poor dear man!" said Mrs. Vince, when, after dinner, she was told the whole story (Mr. Vince did not even try to keep the full horror of what had come to town from his wife's knowledge). "Somehow you have managed to totally mismanage your delightful relation. I shall go

and see her. I am very, very sure she won't talk that sort of nonsense to me."

"But, Marcella, I really do not like your coming into contact with such a woman," replied her husband.

"Leave all that to me," was the cheerful answer; and happy now he had confessed the worst, and feeling assured he could not possibly leave the whole matter in better hands, Mr. Vince leant back in his solid mahogany morocco-covered easy-chair, and sank into a blissful nap.

CHAPTER IV.

HAVING, as it seemed, done his best to ruin the hay crop of the whole of the North of Ireland, the good Saint Swithin suddenly relented, and, except for an occasional shower, called, according to the taste of the speaker, a "dribble," a "spurt," or a "few drops for heat," did no further real injury.

The rich, long grass, "laid" so hopelessly by twenty-four hours' incessant rain, was at length cut, and "in swath." Much of it had, however, still to be scattered and dried; "but if," said Mr. Muir, "with the Lord's help, we're able to get it into cock before more rain comes, we'll do yet."

It was at breakfast, seven anxious days after that morning when he stood splicing his gig-whip and "threeping" with Bell, who, in the long-run, generally got the best of such en-

counters, that Mr. Muir made this statement for any one to appropriate who pleased.

As it happened, no one did appropriate or even verbally notice it. "The Ensign" shot a telling glance at Carline, which Miss Muir intercepted. The five children invited over for "the hay-making, to toss and ted," were looking ruefully at their messes of semi-cold porridge—served in soup-plates. Mr. Muir's second daughter was absent, superintending the frying of a further supply of bacon and eggs—fat bacon, salt, moreover, and eggs fried in that fat—and there was no one else present.

As a rule, Mr. Muir so far unbent as to take his meals in the kitchen. It was a cheerful kitchen, well lighted, with red-tiled floor, walls coloured a tint of warm yellow ochre, a fireplace large enough to roast an ox, generally well filled with blazing peat, over which, on a massive crane, hung suspended a huge pot, or burly kettle, or leviathan griddle, according to the nature of the food in preparation. There was nothing to object to about the kitchen, with its well-scrubbed

dresser ornamented to overflowing with homely delft, its walls decorated with lids of copper and tin, in which, as in convex mirrors, the faces of the family were reflected lugubriously lengthened, its warmth, its look of plenty increased by the flitches of bacon and rounds of hung beef depending from great hooks in the ceiling; its hearth littered with feathery ashes from the glowing turf; its look out into the farmyard, with just a glimpse of orchard and waving trees beyond; the great oven, in which myriad tarts and tartlets, destined to be consumed by "the best in the land," had been baked to a turn in the days which were departed; but when the young officer declared himself sufficiently recovered from the effects of the awful accident, that threw him maimed and insensible on the hospitality of a man he only knew as a sort of eccentric horse-dealer, to be able to leave his sleeping apartment and join the family circle, Mr. Muir's fiat went forth.

"We'll eat in the parlour while the Ensign stops here, Bell," said that estimable maiden's papa; "and don't be stinting us in the tea, and

we'll have white sugar instead of brown ; I'll fetch it for you from Forster Green's; and get out the good cloths your mother brought me, the Ardoyne damask, with the beautiful wreaths of convolvulus running all over it as natural as among the gooseberry bushes 'out by' in the garden."

"I like the two with the rose, shamrock, and thistle in posies dotted about, or that pair where the bunches of lilies are tied up by true lovers' knots, best myself," urged Miss Muir, the spirit of contradiction and a hatred of anything flowing and unsymmetrical stirring well within her heart.

"Never mind you, Bell, what you like or dislike," returned her genial parent; "you do what I tell you. Bring out the finest and best Ardoyne can do, and some day we'll ask the young man who has dined with Baronets and Earls whether England, spite of all her money, can show better work than Michael Andrews turns out in the old place at Ardoyne, where the sun peeps in through the low wide sashes, and the men can see the tremble of green leaves and hear the

songs of wild birds standing before their Jacquard looms."

"If you go on praising Ireland that way to the Ensign, he'll be telling you one day she's just what the English make her out."

"And that's—?" said Mr. Muir, interrogatively and defiantly.

"Not much to boast about," returned the fair Bell, reluctantly leaving the room to find those hoarded cloths, concerning which her father had spoken.

Between herself and the young officer there existed a sort of armed neutrality, the lines of which were being constantly overstepped by one or other of the high contracting powers: now it was Miss Muir who stealthily made a sly flank movement; again it was her opponent, who gave the lady what she called a "slap with his tongue." There was no possible subject concerning which they failed to disagree; and Mr. Muir was wont to sit enjoying the war of words, glad at heart to hear Bell getting the worst of the encounter. "The Ensign has a calm sort of way with him

you can make no head against," the farmer constantly told his daughter; "you had best take advice, my woman, and let him alone."

"He won't let me alone," answered Miss Muir; "and it is just beyond my patience to see him treated, as he is, like some wee god. He hasn't a thought to spare for anything but himself, as you'll maybe find out to your cost some day. Look at the money we've been out already over him; and all the thanks you need ever look for will be just a jeer. I don't know what you see about him, I'm sure; and as for Carline—"

"What of her?" asked Mr. Muir sharply.

"O, not much; but likely you'll find it enough!" retorted Bell, who was wildly jealous of her half-sister's lovely face, and whose accusations generally took the form of hint and innuendo. According to Bell the wit and wisdom and sagacity of the whole household were concentrated in her own homely person. She thought more than anybody; she suspected things which no one else ever thought of; she was a detective officer and a prophet of evil conjoined; and Mr. Muir disliked

her as much as he could "one of his own blood."

"If you speak at all, Bell," he said, "it would be as well if you'd speak out."

"I make no doubt I could find plenty to speak about," she replied; "but it mightn't be quite agreeable."

Mr. Muir thought of this oracular utterance as he looked at Carline and the officer, who faced each other. He had thought of it and various other dark sayings let drop from time to time by the immaculate Bell; but the hay and the weather, and a perplexity he was in about his son, had hitherto prevented that fitting of two and two together he felt necessary to make a good job of the matter. Now, however, a something indefinable about Carline's downcast eyes, and the manner in which she handed bread across to the officer, caused him to wonder when that young man would be well enough to return to headquarters.

He wanted him to buy a horse before leaving Ardilaw, but Ensign Ludham seemed to be in no

more violent hurry to conclude that purchase than to confess himself quite off the sick list. "I must do something," was Mr. Muir's mental conclusion, and then he asked his guest,

"Are you not for any porridge, Ensign, before you've your breakfast? There is nothing like a basin of it and about a pint of milk for starting the day."

"Thank you, Mr. Muir. I am sure you are sincere in your views; but if the day can only be started satisfactorily on porridge, I should prefer never starting it at all."

"Some day you may be glad to get porridge," broke in Miss Muir.

"I have sinned, I admit," returned her adversary; "but I really do not think I have sinned sufficiently to deserve such a punishment."

"It is a shame to hear you abuse good food that way, and before the children, too," persisted Bell.

"Ah, I forgot the children; and one ought always to be moral before the young! My dears, if you eat a few pounds of boiled meal every

morning you will grow up healthy, happy, and wise; if you do not you will fall into evil courses, and probably come to want even a cold potato. There, Miss Muir, could your favourite minister have delivered a better discourse?"

"They'll have to make haste and finish, or we'll have night on us before they get out into the fields," interposed Mr. Muir, who did not at all relish this incursion of innocent life, and often informed his daughter the "imps spoilt more nor they made." "What with burying one another in it, and rolling and stretching themselves their length, the hay is not fit for a cow to eat, let alone a horse. I had to take a whip to them yesterday; the grass in the upland had just been put into cop when they came tearing down from the paddock, leaving the gate wide after them. In five minutes, ay, in two, every cop was flat, the three colts galloping about like mad, and the children clapping hands and hurrooing till you'd have thought the Siege of Derry was on again. Yes, just let me catch you at such a game a second time, and I'll not merely chastise

you myself, but I'll walk you over to your father, and you'll see what he'll give you."

"It is the unknown which is always terrible," observed Ensign Ludham, as the small sinners drooped their heads, and meekly devoured their messes of pottage.

"I'm thinking they know all about it well enough," said Miss Muir, eager for another round. "They've felt the weight of their father's hand often enough."

"How touching! What a delightful thing to possess such a father!"

"Here's Sam Dopp," exclaimed all the children in a breath.

"They are not able to make any noise, are they?" said the young officer. "There are few things more exhilarating than to hear five sets of lungs shouting as with one mouth."

"Would you have the poor things never open their lips?" asked Miss Muir, in stern reproach.

"I wonder what can be bringing Sam over here to-day, and his own hay only half cut?" mumbled Mr. Muir.

Mr. Sam Dopp put in a personal appearance in answer to that question. Just as the farmer finished his sentence the veritable Sam—who was a rather slouching sort of individual, with eyes that did not exactly match—opened the door and looked solemnly in. Then, he said he wouldn't intrude—he wanted to speak a word, but there was no hurry—he would step "out by" and "throw his eye" over the stable—he had breakfasted—"thank you all the same."

"Come in and sit down, man," expostulated Mr. Muir; "if you won't eat you can look on, and it is not totally impossible you might fancy a bit of bacon after your walk. This is Ensign Ludham, that got the smashing fall you've heard tell of." Whereupon, with cruel and elaborate civility, Ensign Ludham rose, bowed and offered Mr. Sam his chair, but Sam would have none of it.

"Don't put yourself out of the way, sir, for me," he entreated. "I'll do very well here;" and he took a seat as remote from the table and as inconvenient for purposes of conversation as was procurable.

"Now, children," began Mr. Muir, "if you can find nothing to do here but to sit staring, you might as well go into the field. Mind what I told you," he added, as they filed out of the room; "you'll go home, sure as you're living, if you don't behave yourselves."

"If I behave myself very well indeed, Mr. Muir, may I not go into the field and toss hay too?" asked the Ensign. "I think it would make me feel quite young again."

"And I think you had better take care of yourself for a day or two more. The sooner you get strong, the sooner you'll be able to go back to your work. I am sure your colonel must be breaking his heart to see you again."

"I imagine he must. As you are aware, Miss Muir, I am universally loved and respected."

"That is a good hearing," sneered Bell.

"I had to pass the office this morning, and so I thought I might as well ask if they had a letter for you," said Mr. Dopp, wrestling with the torn lining of his coat before he could find the pocket where he had deposited something belonging to

Mr. Muir. "O, here it is! They said it was from your son, and you'd be glad to get it early."

"Do they open your correspondence at the post-office, then, Mr. Muir?" asked his guest.

"They know the writing," answered the farmer, even more curtly than was his habit.

He did not open the letter, though his fingers were itching to do so; but sat twirling it round and round, waiting for Mr. Dopp's next word.

Finding that word did not come, however, he himself took the initiative.

"And what can I do for you this fine morning?" he asked.

"Well, I just stepped round to know if you had thought better about the cottage;" and Mr. Dopp turned his head and stared straight out of the window while waiting for Mr. Muir's reply, which did not immediately ensue. "I don't think the pigs would do you any hurt," went on Sam, in a mournful monotone; "they're wholesome creatures, and I'd build the stye myself. You see, I must be clear out by November; and is ill to have to be looking for a house at

that time of the year if you've a lot of young ones."

This remark, which seemed addressed to the landscape rather than to Mr. Muir, was received by that gentleman in dead silence. He drank a cup of tea, while Bell sat eyeing him eagerly, before he answered.

"We've no call to argue the matter any more, Sam. If I had the will I could not set you the place now. It is out of my hands. I've set it."

"Preserve us!" exclaimed Miss Muir. "When did you do that?"

"The last day I was in the town."

"And you never 'let on' a word of what you had done!"

"Why would I be talking about my concerns? There are plenty of women going open-mouthed about the world."

"But you couldn't keep it a secret for ever, and you might as well have told us about your good fortune at first as at last."

"I am the best judge of that."

"Let us hope your father has found a tenant

to his mind, Miss Muir," mischievously suggested Ensign Ludham, who indeed felt jubilant over Bell's discomfiture.

"It is early days to know much about him, whoever he may be," retorted the lady.

"If you must know, it is not a him at all. It is a widow woman, with the best of relations."

"You had better be careful, Mr. Muir," said the officer, laughing.

"I mean to be; there is not the woman born I'd care to bring home again. I've had three wives, and that's enough for me."

"You do not want to be too greedy."

"No; I'll content myself now; but all this won't get the hay up. I must be going;" and with a nod to Mr. Dopp, who, since the uprooting of all those hopes so sedulously nursed by Bell, had sat like one dazed by some startling intelligence, the farmer left the room, and proceeding to the kitchen, which was entirely deserted, sat down to read his letter. He went over its contents three times, then he went up to his bedroom and locked it away. After that he walked briskly

to a meadow already dotted with those picturesque haystacks the climate of Ireland necessitates ere the crop can be safely gathered into great ricks, where he remained harrying his labourers and the women, who also were hard at work, till dinner-time approached, when he thoughtfully retraced his steps towards the house.

As he came within sight of an angle formed by the garden hedge, he caught just the flutter of a woman's skirt whisking off as fast as its wearer could hurry away.

Changing his own course and entering the garden, he saw the Ensign apparently engaged in rapt contemplation of a currant-bush, on which the young fry had not left a single berry.

"I am glad to find you are able to walk so far," said the farmer. "I hope you'll not do yourself any injury."

The officer, turning as though he had not heard the sound of Mr. Muir's footsteps, smiled as he answered,

"O no; I really am getting quite strong again."

"That will be good news for all your friends."

"You are very kind to say so, Mr. Muir. If it had not been for the nursing and hospitality received in your house, my friends would scarcely have heard that good news for many a long day."

Perfectly well the young scamp knew war would shortly be declared by the man who had accorded him shelter and a welcome; but so long as it suited the farmer to keep his claws hidden, Ensign Ludham determined to take no notice of such things being in existence.

"If you have not been tiring yourself out, maybe you'd have a mind to walk with me as far as the field, after dinner," suggested Mr. Muir.

"Nothing I should like better. Had it not been for your prohibition I should have followed you this morning; but I really do want to get well and strong. I must not presume on such kindness as I have received here for ever."

Mr. Muir was wary enough not to commit himself to anything which might be construed into a further invitation, but yet he belonged to

a people too genuinely hospitable to remain totally silent.

"That's nothing—nothing at all," he said, in a courtly spirit of compromise.

"Nothing!" repeated his guest. "I'd like to know who would have done for a total stranger what you have."

"I'd be very sorry to think any one of the neighbours wouldn't have done as much, at any rate," answered Mr. Muir, feeling he had scored another trick against the English.

"Bell wants to know if she'll put the dinner down again."

It was one of the children who ran across the yard to put this question in all its original force.

"We're coming—we're coming. You see," added Mr. Muir, by way of indirect apology, "she's thinking about the crop. My daughter Bell is a very thrifty young woman."

"I never before had the pleasure of meeting any one more thrifty," said Ensign Ludham. "Admirable in every relation of life."

Mr. Muir did not feel quite satisfied on this latter point, so he wisely held his tongue.

"Won't you draw up your chair?" suggested Miss Muir to the officer as he entered the room, where she was already seated at the head of the festive board. "I hope you can eat boiled beef and greens. Lizzie, just set the Ensign a plate for his skins."

"I assure you, Miss Muir, I have only one," said the irrepressible Ensign; but he did not look across at Carline as he spoke. Since breakfast matters had progressed to a stage in which glances are rather avoided.

"Ay, ay," thought the farmer, on whom no sign, however trivial, was now lost; "it's time you got your marching orders, my boy."

For a few minutes there was little said; scarcely a sound broke the stillness but the clatter of knives and forks, and an occasional request for potatoes. Even Miss Muir, who had some small household care on her mind, refrained from what her father was wont to term "side wipes." She did not fling indirect taunts at the Ensign for

preferring water to milk in any form; the children having happily been provided with a sufficient meal in the kitchen, it was not possible for her to bid them sit up, or eat properly, or in any other way instruct them in the way they should go; whilst during the whole of dinner she spoke no word of scorn even to Carline, whose shortcomings usually furnished an interlude whenever conversation flagged, as it had often a knack of doing—not wholly peculiar to Ardilaw.

"That beef's not bad, Bell; I think I could take another cut," said Mr. Muir, after a silence devoted entirely to the benefit of his inner man; then, as the red-armed, rough-handed Phyllis called Poll carried his plate round for that second supply of food he felt the case required, he added, as a casual piece of information of no great importance,

"I've got a bit of news for you all. You may look to see Gorman next week. That's my only son, you know, Ensign—my first-born."

The bit of news dropped like a shell amongst those present. Miss Muir sat with carving-knife

and fork suspended in mid-air; Sarah and Carline turned and stared at their father in amazement; Molly nearly let the plate she was holding drop, so great was her astonishment; while for a moment even Ensign Ludham failed presence of mind to say,

"I remember; that is the gentleman you told me had been adopted when quite a child by his uncle."

"That's quite right. His mother's uncle took him from me when he was only two years of age."

"And he has never been in this part of the country since, Ensign," observed Miss Muir.

"How glad you will be to see him!" commented the Ensign, with a benignant smile, happy to think there were evil days in store for Bell—days during the course of which his own many grievances would be amply avenged.

CHAPTER V.

"I HAVE been thinking that, as your son is at last returning to his ancestral roof-tree, the sooner I take my departure the better. Charming as no doubt I have made myself, it is, I fear, a melancholy fact that under the circumstances you will find my room even pleasanter than my company."

"It is out of the way considerate of you mentioning such a thing," said Mr. Muir, who had not yet quite made up his mind whether he most desired Ensign Ludham's absence or presence.

Two o'clock had struck, the afternoon sun was as hot as any sun ever can be in Ireland, only two or three pure white clouds flecked the blue expanse of heaven, the green of the meadows had become vivid, a westerly wind caressed the sunburnt cheeks of lowly haymakers; down in the

glen a trickling stream flowed slowly to music of its own making; the peaceful stir of country life pervaded the whole landscape, and Mr. Muir and his guest were, according to agreement, sauntering over the grass in order that the former might see "with his own two eyes," to quote Miss Bell, how work was progressing.

No figure less like the typical Arcadian than Mr. Muir's probably ever before crossed the sweet summer fields.

Tall, gaunt, erect, uncompromising, clad in a suit of evening black, white linen shirt, black stock, and high hat, he stalked solemnly beside Ensign Ludham, who wore a pair of loose gray trousers, no waistcoat, an old velvet shooting-jacket much the worse for wear, a broad-brimmed straw hat pushed back from his forehead, a turn-down collar fastened with a gold stud, carried a notched and gnarled blackthorn lent him by his host, and halted perceptibly as he struggled onward.

Mr. Muir looked askance at the youth as they walked along. He would not have thought much,

or indeed at all, about "the boy" limping, if it had not been for what Bell had said concerning him. Bell's utterances were, as a rule, so eminently disagreeable, she found it quite unnecessary to add to their unpleasantness by falsehood; therefore her friends had not even the satisfaction of believing there might not be a grain of truth in what she said. Miss Muir's conclusions might be open to doubt, but her facts were incontrovertible. If she stated, not that she thought, but that she had seen, a thing, there could be no question on the subject; and Bell, a full week back, declared the Ensign went up-stairs three steps at a time. Mr. Muir had never beheld him doing anything of the sort; but that proved nothing. He was getting to feel "dubious" about the officer's straightforwardness. He had "a pleasant way with him," and he came of "decent people," and his ways were "agreeable," and his manners beyond the common affable; yet, still—the farmer thought a great deal as he noticed Ensign Ludham's painful walk, and at last he said,

"I am afraid you're not as strong on that bad leg as we could wish."

"O, it's getting all right," answered the young hypocrite. "I ought not to have stood on it so long this morning, that's all."

"I believe you're correct there," agreed Mr. Muir, in a tone which meant much more than his words.

"At any rate," answered the officer, "I shall be well enough to relieve you of my company very shortly. I should like, if I may, to remain here over Sunday. Then, supposing you could give me a lift as far as Holywood, I'd charter a boat across the Lough—Skirton is at Carrickfergus, in command of our company, and I ought to join him there."

"Carrick's a fine heartsome place," returned the farmer, more perplexed in his mind than ever, now the hour of parting seemed imminent, as to whether he most wished the officer to go or to stay.

"I am very glad indeed to hear you say so, Mr. Muir, for I have always been given to under-

stand the officers' quarters faced the east, which, as we all know, is a peculiarly healthy aspect for delicate people."

"But, Ensign, you're surely not just that delicate yourself?" suggested Mr. Muir anxiously.

"I put the matter generally," observed Mr. Ludham, with a lofty composure; "but, if we must descend to particulars, I am *not* strong. When I am at home, my mother is always asking the doctor about my heart and lungs (no interesting disease, as you must be well aware, ever attaches itself to the liver); and that good gentleman makes a point of tapping my chest, as a woodpecker does a tree, and with a like result. He says something about me is hollow."

"Maybe he's not so far out," remarked Mr. Muir.

"And as mine," calmly continued Ensign Ludham, too wise to take any notice of Mr. Muir's nasty sarcasm, "is considered a very valuable life—only five healthy persons intervene between me and a baronetcy—I am tormented to

put my feet in hot water, and wear flannels, and beware of damp, and go to bed with the lamb, and lie ever so late in the morning; so, you see, I can't be strong, Mr. Muir, I can't indeed. It is only the enormous care you have taken of me which has preserved its brightest ornament to the Rutlandshire Ragamuffins, as the —th regiment is affectionately nicknamed."

"If you're tired, won't you sit a bit?" inquired Mr. Muir, hospitably pointing to a felled tree lying near a thorn hedge close at hand. "I'd be vexed if a man that's held of such account came to harm as long as he stops at Ardilaw."

With an appreciative grin, the young fellow stretched himself full length on the trunk, his once injured leg well in evidence, his hat tilted over his eyes—his whole attitude that of utter rest and contentment, presenting a marked contrast to the stiff figure seated bolt upright at his feet.

"As you urge me so strongly, I think I will indulge in a cigar," said the Ensign, putting one lazy hand into his pocket and drawing out his

case. "Can't I tempt you, Mr. Muir? I don't think I have ever seen you smoke."

"No; and I don't think you ever will," returned Mr. Muir. "There was a time—once—when I liked a smoke as well as any man; but I gave it up because a woman could not bear the smell of tobacco, and I've never had pipe or cigar between my lips since."

"Really? How very interesting! I hope I am not indiscreet in concluding you were in love with the lady."

"I was, or you may be sure I wouldn't have given up my will to her pleasure."

"What a touching reminiscence! I wonder whether I shall ever be sufficiently in love to relinquish anything for the sake of my fair."

"It is not over and above likely," answered the farmer, with saturnine enjoyment of his own wit; and there ensued a pause, during the continuance of which the song of the grasshoppers became distinctly audible, and the officer's thoughts went flitting about like the butterflies flashing through the summer air.

"She was my first wife," observed Mr. Muir, at length breaking silence.

"She! Who? Good gracious, what are you talking about?" cried Ensign Ludham. "O, I *beg* your pardon. I had quite forgotten. You mean, of course, the lady you preferred to tobacco."

"Just that," said Mr. Muir, a little downheartedly, for he felt himself repulsed, as hard natures often do when they lapse into sentiment.

"You were *very* fond of her?" hazarded the officer, raising himself on his elbow—shallow waters can reflect cloud and sunshine even better than great oceans, which sometimes seem almost to absorb both.

"Ay, and so would you have been if you'd seen her," answered the farmer, grimly in earnest. For once he had scraped the mould out of his dead wife's grave, and raised her coffin lid, and looked on the dust therein, while smiling through the years he beheld the fair bright face which had thrilled his youth with rapture. *That*, at least, was not lying under the sod. Though cold,

hard, and stern might be the religion he professed, yet the poetry and the passion which underlie all Celtic nature told him, in tones more convincing than any creed, that somewhere, *somewhere*, he would again see that face glorified, all traces of tears wiped away, all sorrow dispelled. Between them—for his Calvinist Pharisaism could not at such a supreme moment blind him to the fact that he was, keeping within the law, as coldly wicked a man as ever drew breath—there might yawn a gulf deep and long as that dividing heaven from hell; nevertheless, he felt with his eyes he should behold her, even from afar, as certainly as at that moment memory gave him back a glimpse of dark laughing eyes, and red pouting lips, and cheeks the southern sun seemed to have been kissing, and wavy hair, with little more than the suspicion of a curl about it, and a heart—O God! what had that heart not been ere it broke, and in breaking made no sign!

"It is a most fortunate thing I never did know her." Thus Ensign Ludham all unwittingly dispelled the vision Mr. Muir had con-

jured up out of the depths of thirty years spent in sin and hard work. "Of course I should at once have fallen over head and ears in love—a feeling you will understand she must immediately have reciprocated—and there never lived a man less desirous of disturbing conjugal peace than myself. On the whole, Heaven knows what is best for us, Mr. Muir."

"You've a light way of talking. I wonder if it covers a depth of evil-doing?"

"You need not wonder. There never was so childlike and innocent a young fellow as myself. Bless you, I know nothing concerning the sins of this wicked old world. An idyllic life is the life for me. I could make myself happy at Ardilaw for ever, doing nothing useful, of course. Do tell me all about your first wife, your love's young dream, if talking on the subject will not distress you."

Ensign Ludham bit the end off his cigar, lit a match, placed himself in a more comfortable position, while Mr. Muir sat with bowed head, hands loosely clasped, wrestling hard with thought

and memory. For any one who knew something of humanity it must have been apparent that between the two men there stretched centuries of civilisation. There sat a savage—reluctantly conforming to law, influenced by a vague religion. Stretched at his ease, full length, upon a fallen tree, lay a reprobate out of whom modern scepticism and social culture had crushed every spark of manhood, save superficial courtesy and physical courage.

The first scarcely understood the full meaning of social restraint, the second had outstepped its boundaries. He was as dangerous an inmate as a man possessed of a pretty daughter could have desired within his doors, as cool a hand, as thoroughpaced a blackguard, as ever, when the hour came for mere brute daring to assert itself, rode cheerily through the Valley of Death to spike an enemy's guns, or marched on bravely to the front, knowing full well that every bullet has its billet.

"I'd like well to tell you some little about myself, if it wouldn't tire you over-much," said

Mr. Muir, in a low hushed voice, as if he were talking in a church.

"Should be only too charmed," murmured his guest, turning himself indolently, so as the better to catch such words of wisdom as might on that summer's afternoon be wandering about Ardilaw.

"My father and my grandfather before him were bailiffs on the Manor of Clonmellin, in the service of the Gorman family—that you may never have heard tell of?"

"Frequently," murmured the officer, who, till that hour, was unaware such a place as Clonmellin existed.

"The Gormans had a grand domain. I don't say it brought in much money—for it was mostly seashore and mountain, all but the made land about the house—but you could walk and ride for hours, days almost, over their property. There were parts where a sheep would have starved—but the wild fowl fattened. I've myself killed, on a cold, quiet night, thirty wild duck. Lord! what was there in the way of game you might not have found on those hills!"

"You never by chance met with a lion or a tiger when you were prowling about poaching?" suggested Ensign Ludham.

"I never did; but if I had I wouldn't have been afraid," said Mr. Muir. "No more afraid than to answer to the charge of 'poaching' in any of your English courts. We had leave to shoot what we liked; if we hadn't, my father would have shot me for bringing home what I did. He was a faithful servant. He wouldn't have wronged his master of an ear of corn. The agent for the property lived in Dublin, and came down twice a year to see how things were going on; but my father was really the managing and capable man; he had all things under his hand—money, and stock and crop, and land."

"And all this time, may one inquire what the Gorman of Clonmellin was about? Was he quite content to leave everything under your father's hand, and ask no inconvenient or unseasonable questions?"

"Yes, quite content," said Mr. Muir, with conviction. "Where there's no fraud, a master

has no need to ask questions. My great-grandfather was Scotch, and they hanged him on a tree in front of his own house because, being a Covenanter, he wouldn't go against his convictions."

"What a plucky old gentleman!" commented the Ensign.

"He was that; my father used to sit by the hour and tell me stories about him—stories he had heard from his father, you understand."

"All of which, perhaps, one day soon you will tell me, Mr. Muir; just at present I am dying to hear something of your wife."

"I am coming to her, but you do just as well to whip me on a bit. I'll tell you what the countryside called her—Miss Katty Gorman—bonny, bright, beautiful Katty Gorman."

"Really! and you were glad, no doubt, to marry her, spite of the bar sinister."

"What do you mean? Do you think she wasn't the man's daughter?"

"Pray, don't be so vehement, Mr. Muir. I intended no offence. I had no doubt of the fair Katty being Mr. Gorman's child; but—" And

the Ensign's pause suggested more than any words he could have spoken.

Up into the farmer's face surged a dull and passionate red, which for a moment tinged forehead and cheeks with a wholly foreign colour. For a moment he felt as though some one had slapped him with an open hand—the suggestion, though false, affected him more painfully than the keenest truth could have done, since it seemed to imply so certainly no one who belonged of right to decent people could possibly have mated with himself. Just for a moment he hesitated, then—

"You are out this time, Ensign," he said, not without a certain triumph. "My wife was Mr. Terence Gorman's eldest child, born in lawful wedlock, and her mother as grand and high a lady as your own. There was nothing wanting on *her* side, and if her people had only given me the ghost of a chance, I'll swear they would have found nothing wanting on *mine*."

"The Gormans were blind, then, Mr. Muir, to your manifold excellences, inherited and otherwise," said the officer, taking the cigar out of his

mouth, and again raising himself on one elbow, the better to contemplate at his leisure a man detested at Clonmellin.

"They couldn't read me as I was, more's the pity," explained the farmer. "They were looking for thoughts and notions that had no place in me."

"Without wishing for a moment to side with these unappreciative Gormans, might I inquire how you managed to secure the eldest daughter of such a house? Of course the fact of having had a great-grandfather who was hung would score immensely in your favour; but descent isn't everything. As a rule, rich folk have a detestable way of asking the length of your purse. Am I wrong, Mr. Muir, in imagining you were, in your first youth, not exactly a millionaire?"

"I had not much money, but I had something else. You might not think it to look at me now, Ensign; but when I wanted a few years of being your age all the women were running after me. Now, that's a statement might astonish you."

"Quite the contrary; it only proves what I

have always thought, that the dear creatures possess an instinct as true as rapid."

"I'm well aware," proceeded Mr. Muir, "that no one could call me exactly handsome at this present time—"

"I don't want to make you blush; so I will only say you are greatly mistaken," said the Ensign, without a change of countenance.

"I know I am not," maintained the farmer stoutly; "but that was all different once. I had a notion of setting myself off, too. I mostly carried a flower in my button-hole; and—"

"Excuse my interrupting you; but did the proposal come from Miss Gorman?"

"No; that it didn't. I wouldn't say but she met me half-way. She was a free, innocent sort of girl—had not a thought of harm. I could not just tell you now how it all began; but I know how it ended. We made a match of it; and you may be very sure that day I thought my fortune was made."

"And had none of the lady's friends a suspicion of what was going on?"

"Not a suspicion. She had not a friend near at hand but an old aunt of her father's, half blind and whole doting. Her mother was dead; Mr. Gorman was married the second time to a daughter of Lord Dunfelde, and the pair lived in London, making the first wife's money spin. Ay, you might say there was not an egg laid on Clonmellin manor, or a pat of butter printed, but the price of it went across the Channel. Why, Mr. Gorman hadn't been in Ireland for years till he came back to turn my wife out of doors."

"I see—and so your fortune was not made, Mr. Muir."

"Faith, no. I got something in my hand, but not much—and my father lost his situation, which was a crying shame, for the man knew no more of what had happened than his employer. And they behaved cruelly to my wife—cruelly. They broke her heart; she only lived three months after her child was born—that's Gorman, you know."

"He was brought up by some relation, was he not?"

"Yes, by his mother's uncle, Mr. Trevasson, of Mount Michael, county Kilkenny. The Trevassons were originally Cornish folk. I've never set eyes on the lad since he was two years of age, and now he must be getting on for eight-and-twenty."

"What does he do?"

"He does not do anything but amuse himself. He wanted to be an officer like yourself, but the old man wouldn't hear of it."

"O!" said Ensign Ludham. "What a pleasure it will be to him to make acquaintance with his family!"

"I'm not so sure of that," answered the farmer; "you see our way of living is scarcely such as he has been used to, and I could have wished—"

"If he is of my mind, you need wish no greater happiness for him than a month at Ardilaw," said the young man politely.

"I feel obliged to you. If you think you are rested, perhaps we might move on."

They "moved on" over the newly-mown

field—the Ensign carrying his hat in his hand and still limping painfully; the farmer warning him not to step into any drain, and to beware of worm-casts.

What with the haymakers, the carts, the horses, the dogs, and the children, that hill field presented a most picturesque appearance.

"I'd like to sketch this," said the officer.

"Well, what would hinder you? Lizzie 'll run in and bring anything you need."

"Thank you, greatly. Here, Lizzie; I want the drawing-book you'll find on my table, and a couple of pencils, and—but whom have we here, Mr. Muir? By Jove, what a horse!"

Turning, Mr. Muir looked down the field, and saw, entering by the "gap" made for the carts to pass through, a man and horse. The horse was jet black; except for the star on its forehead the creature had not a white hair about it. The man dismounted, and passing his arm through the bridle came straight on towards the haymakers.

"This is likely some friend of yours, Ensign," suggested the farmer.

"He is no friend of mine, I think. He is a fine-looking fellow, though, let him be who he may. Let us go to meet him."

When the stranger got close to them he stopped, and said a little doubtfully, "Is Mr. Muir here?"

"My name is Muir," answered the farmer. There was the slightest perceptible pause—then,

"You do not know me?"

"Well, I can't say that I do. Surely you're not—"

"I am Gorman Muir," was the answer; and father and son shook hands.

CHAPTER VI.

"It is a bad job," said Mr. Muir; "a very bad job."

"It is so bad it could not well be worse," answered his son.

The quiet night had stolen softly on, gradually enfolding in its dusky mantle the azures and the gold light of a perfect summer's day. A tender silence, broken only by the ripple of the river, the rustling of the leaves, or the scurry of a rabbit, brooded over Ardilaw. Late and hard the haymakers had worked, but they lay now asleep at home; the children, whose holiday was drawing to an end, were all abed. The Misses Muir had retired to rest; the kitchen fire had long been "slacked," ready in a few hours to be once again blown up into a flame with the help of a pair of wheezy bellows; the servant-of-all-work was sleeping the sleep of utter weariness, the

soiled and dog-eared dream-book, conned by the light of a guttering dip before she lay down, still clutched in one red unlovely hand, that yet was not without its pathos; eleven o'clock P.M. had come and passed, and still Mr. Muir and his son sate in the parlour—once upon a time my lady's dining-room—talking earnestly.

Ensign Ludham was gone. "Chains and fetters," as Miss Muir poetically remarked at a subsequent period, "couldn't have kept him after he set eyes on Gorman." Go he would; and, spite of all persuasion, go he did. Old Ned, the blind horse, that could well-nigh have counted years with Miss Bell, had, after a long day's work in the hay-field, been "shoved" into the gig, so that the officer and his fortunes might be jogged comfortably to the railway station. He had declined the pleasure of Mr. Muir's company on the ground that he could not think of taking him away from his son; and he negatived the son's offer of "tooling him" because that gentleman must "be so overjoyed to meet his father."

Bag, if not baggage, the Ensign was gone.

Laughingly he had tossed Bell's last taunt back to that charming maiden; he had distributed largesse all round; found time and opportunity to whisper a word in Carline's ear; he had once more expressed his obligations to Mr. Muir, and accepted Gorman's help into the gig; then, accompanied to the gate by the children, who all "tore down" the avenue like "mad things" to unfasten and click the latch, he departed from Ardilaw.

And now another person sat in Ensign Ludham's accustomed chair, and stared out through the windows, destitute of blind or curtain, into the semi-darkness of the summer's night.

Any person looking into the room would, by the light of an oil lamp suspended from the ceiling, have seen a strange interior. On the centre of an oaken floor, off which the passage of heavy boots had scraped well-nigh all the polish, was spread a small square of worn and faded carpet. The panelled walls were destitute of ornament of any kind, sort, or description. Above the chimney-piece, which was of Sienna marble, a

richly-carved over-mantel rose to the cornice. Into this a few nails had been driven, and these supported, as on a rack, a cane and couple of riding-whips, and the blade of a sword-fish. On the mantelshelf stood a couple of valuable old china basins, used as receptacles for bills, letters, receipts, screws of tobacco, broken pipes, and odds and ends of string; to a hook just above hung suspended the "tawse," by means of which Mr. Muir had driven his progeny along the way they should go. On a chiffonier, placed in a recess beside the fireplace, were ranged a few old books, the family Bible, and a workbox which belonged to Mr. Muir's mother. The rest of the furniture consisted of one of those dining-tables of which the flaps can be dropped down at pleasure, the legs under all circumstances constituting themselves a distinct nuisance, an ancient sofa, originally upholstered in shiny horsehair like the fourteen uneasy chairs that formed the suite, but which Bell's industrious fingers had re-covered with sundry breadths taken out of the many "good" dresses left behind by her mother

when that sainted woman departed this wicked world.

In one of the uncomfortable armchairs belonging to the "horsehair and solid mahogany suite" sat Mr. Muir, a glass of punch smoking at his elbow, perplexity engraven in the clearest letters on every line and wrinkle of his face. Opposite to him, in another armchair of the same recondite and mysterious build, the younger man lay nearly at full length, his legs stretched out, his feet crossed, his head resting on the sharp edge of the back rail of the chair, a tumbler of whisky and cold water standing, scarcely touched, at his elbow; a half-smoked cigar held between the finger and thumb of his right hand; his whole weary attitude that of a man thoroughly permeated with his conviction that "the job" to which his father had referred was indeed one difficult to make worse.

"What could have possessed the man?" said Mr. Muir, in continuance of the conversation.

"A woman," was his son's pithy explanation.

"And at his time of life, too! Dear, O dear!"

"The older a man the more likely he is to make a fool of himself."

"Couldn't you have stopped the match by any manner of honest means?"

"Not unless I had married her myself."

"And why didn't you? Man alive, why didn't you?"

"For one reason, because I should not have been any better off. A single pauper does not cost so much to keep as two."

"That's true enough. I had forgotten everything except how you might have kept your uncle from committing such wickedness."

"And, besides," continued Mr. Gorman Muir, putting his dead cigar in his mouth and puffing as though it had been alight, "I hate her."

"Do you, though? That is bad. The Scriptures say we ought to hate no man, and I suppose that means we ought to hate no woman either."

"I don't know what the Scriptures say—and

I don't much care. It is human nature to hate what is hateful, and Mrs. Trevasson is detestable."

"My word, not even handsome, then?"

"I did not say she was not handsome. She is. So were Delilah and Jezebel, and a whole host more of delightful ladies of that type, unless the painters have played us very false indeed. For my own part, however, I do not like Delilahs or Jezebels, or, for that matter, Judiths either, even at a distance; and when we come to close quarters I hate them;" and, as if it had been one of the historical dames in question, Mr. Gorman Muir flung his half-finished cigar under the grate in a rage.

Though he did not smoke, Mr. Muir, ere seeking the solitude of his own chamber, recovered the fag end of that cigar, observing to himself as he carefully wiped it clear of soot and dust, "He must have been accustomed to awful waste."

"Wasn't there any way you could have made friends with Mrs. Trevasson, so that you still

might have got the run of your teeth and kept a roof over your head at Mount Michael?"

Mr. Muir junior threw up his arms, put his hands under his head, stretched himself out a little longer, and laughed a laugh which had in it more of anger than amusement.

"Couldn't you?" repeated his father earnestly. "Though I was not so bad-looking once, I never in my best days had the advantages you possess. You are well put together, 'suple,' strongly knit, far-and-away from ill-favoured, smooth in your speech, and as fit to talk to any lady as the Ensign himself. What would have hindered your pleasing your uncle's young wife? When I was your age, I'd like to have seen the woman I couldn't cajole."

"'Give me twelve hours,'" quoted Mr. Gorman Muir, "'and I'll distance the handsomest man in England.'"

"Then why in the name of fortune didn't you make the new mistress (bad luck to her!) that fond of you she wouldn't let your uncle part his nephew?" said Mr. Muir, speaking in that series of ellipses of which the Irish are so fond.

"If you must know, the new mistress, as you call her, was too fond of me already."

"Ho, ho!" ejaculated Mr. Muir; "I deemed you were keeping some cat snug in a bag. I thought to myself, from the first, there's more yet he's not telling me."

"I shouldn't have told you now," retorted his son, "only I want you to understand clearly there is no good in thinking matters can ever be made up with my uncle."

"I am not so sure I just understand the whole business yet," answered Mr. Muir, whose strongest point was obstinate antagonism. "How did the old man come to the rights of the affair?"

"He has not come to the rights of the affair. He never will come to the rights of the affair."

"Lord, man! you're worse nor Samson and his honey in the lion's carcase. Can't you speak out, and say in so many plain words what you mean?"

"I mean, in plain words, that Dora Antrim was in love with *me*."

"You needn't raise your voice that way here;

I am not deaf," said Mr. Muir. "In love with you, and then—"

"Finding I would have nothing to do with her, she got hold of my uncle—"

"She was no fool. Better be an old man's darling, you mind, than—"

"And to cut a long story short, they were married."

"Well?"

"They had not been back a week before I found out that she cared for me still."

"Surely, then, you might have had things pretty much your own way?"

"I never pretended to be a saint," said Mr. Gorman Muir, "but I am not a villain."

"Aren't you, now?" retorted Mr. Muir; "but, of course, you know best."

"I know that, at any rate."

"And so I suppose you went to your uncle, and made a clean breast of it."

"I did no such thing. The secret was not mine to tell; and if it had been, I should not have told upon a woman. Further, the story

could not have done me any good. His mind was so warped against me he could not have believed me right in saying black was black."

"My own opinion is, you have bungled the whole business. Couldn't you have spoken the woman fair, and kept in with her a bit till your own turn was served?"

"I tell you I am not a villain, though my poor uncle thinks me one. I told her the same county could not contain both of us, and that I would go; and I was just trying to get some assurance from her husband as to some future help from him, when she took the wind out of my sails by making the vilest accusations against me."

"Ay, ay; the old case of Joseph and his mistress over again, no doubt," said Mr. Muir, nodding sapiently.

"She did not go so far as Mrs. Potiphar," answered his son, an evil light flashing from his dark-brown eyes; "but she went far enough. She declared she would have her revenge upon me, and she has got it now."

"I can't say Joseph was a young man I ever

particularly took to myself," observed Mr. Muir. "There seemed to me a great deal of foolishness about him."

"Probably you would not have acted as he did."

"I'm very sure I would not go to gaol if by whiles flattering of any woman I could keep out of it."

"Then there we join issue," retorted Gorman.

"Well, see what your precipitancy has done for you!"

"Sent me adrift with fifty pounds certain in hand and a thousand pounds possibly ahead."

"And what you're to do, I'm sure I don't know."

"Neither do I; but I mean to think. May I stay here for awhile till I have thought?"

"Where would you stop but in your father's house?" returned Mr. Muir. "You're heartily welcome to all I can give you, and though I don't set myself up to be anything beyond the common, I have managed to save enough to keep me and mine out of the workhouse. There's no call for you to starve while you are here; and now that I

know the worst, I think we may as well be thinking of going to bed. I'll show you the room where Bell has had fresh sheets laid for you, and fine and sweet you'll find them. Things are scarce so straight as they might be if the Ensign had not left in such hot haste, leaving most of his property lying loose behind him. I wish he had stopped a day or two longer, so that you might have got acquainted. Of all the easy, careless, happy-go-lucky young fellows I ever met, he is the chief. Just look at the silver fittings out of his dressing-case lying loose without a lock turned on them. Good-night! I hope you'll have a sound rest."

"I have no doubt of that, for I am very tired. Good-night!" And then Gorman Muir, standing in the very middle of the room, sighed heavily.

All around him were carelessly strewed outward signs of the rank he was leaving, while, short as had been his experience of Ardilaw, he understood pretty well the sort of thing he must expect to meet. Utterly weary, utterly wretched,

utterly disheartened, he undressed as rapidly as possible, and, flinging himself into Miss Bell's snow-white and lavender-scented linen, soon forgot his troubles in a deep and dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER VII.

"WELL, this is a place!" It was Mrs. Boyle who spoke, and she had for audience only that insignificant person, her daughter. "Little feeling as your father ever had for anybody but himself, I think if he knew his widow was exiled like that girl Elizabeth I read about once, to such a Siberia as Clear Stream Cottage, even he would rise up from his grave and try to do justice by a woman who did her duty by him only too well. Early and late I'm sure I was at him to mend his ways."

Berna made no answer while her mother fired this volley over her head; she was unpacking a box, and she did not look up, lest some bullet in mid-career should pierce her brain.

Further, if there were a girl who had learned, in the bitterest school of experience human beings can attend, the beauty of silence and the foolishness of speech, that girl was Berna Boyle.

"Some women might not mind it," continued the widow. "Now there's that Miss Craig we saw at the Whitefords'. I'll be bound she'd consider herself made if anybody said he'd pay the rent of a house like this for her, let alone offer to put a few things in the rooms to make them habitable; but then she never knew the meaning of a different sort of life. By what I can understand, she and her old father—he was some sort of a minister near Derry—never saw anybody but poor fisher people, year out, year in; never went about the world, nor put themselves in the way of getting into good society. You might tell by her manners she had never been further than three miles from home."

"I thought her rather a nice person—homely, but quiet."

"O, she's quiet enough, I grant you, and that's the very reason what would content her wouldn't content me. She knows no better than to sit sewing or knitting the live-long day, without a soul to speak to, or a thing to see. Since I have been standing here, Berna, I have not beheld man,

woman, or child passing along the lane but an old fellow driving a donkey-cart."

"But the place is so sweet, mamma," pleaded the girl. "Of its size, I never saw so pretty a cottage."

"I have nothing so much to say against it, if it wasn't, in a manner of speaking, on the coast of Africa. There's not a creature to pass even the time of day to. Then, the rooms are that small you might reach a book off the opposite wall while you're sitting with your feet on the fender. What we're to do here in the winter, alone with ourselves and old Ruth, goodness only knows, for I don't. And to tell me I'm not to be going to Belfast or calling at Richard Vince's office! It's a crying shame, and I don't care who hears me! It's a crying shame—just as if I had some disease on me like leprosy, only worse, or the mark of Cain stamped deep in my forehead. If I'd committed a murder, I couldn't have been worse treated. What have I done? O, what have I done, to be sent down to a place where there's not even a scullery to the kitchen, nor a bit of grass where

we could feed a cow? (Milk itself does give a feeling of plenty about a house.) If we got one, and tethered her on the slope there—the grazing would not last her a day, and she'd be slipping into the stream and breaking her leg, maybe. What's that you say? Don't I think you had better try to tidy up the room a little? Why, of course I do. If I wasn't so tired, I can hardly drag myself along the passage, I'd have turned to myself and made it fit for anybody to come into; not, goodness knows, that there's much use making anything look well here. Nobody will ever come to such an out-of-the-way hole."

"For our own pleasure, mamma, we may as well have things as comfortable as possible."

"Ah! and indeed it's little pleasure or comfort we need ever look for here. If only I had felt that I dare trust you with that money, we wouldn't have been here as we are this minute. I shall always say it was Richard Vince's wife brought bad luck for us in her hand that day. I wonder if I'll ever forget the shock I got. Why, an infant in arms might have knocked me down."

"Don't think of it," entreated Berna; "and really Mrs. Vince has been most kind.

"O, yes, you're sure to say that, taking part against your own mother! You'll be telling me next, I suppose, the woman is handsome. Why, she's as dark as a negro; how could she miss being, when her own grandmother was a black? That was the one brought the great fortune into the Carpenter family Theoph spent in sinful extravagance—driving four-in-hands and giving dinner-parties where you might have swum in the wine. Well, well; wilful waste, you know—not that the saying came true with me, for a more careful, saving woman never married herself to sorrow and poverty. What in all the wide world do you see out there?—staring as if your great eyes were starting out of your head! My gracious goodness, girl! lay down that duster, and be off and see if you can't make yourself look a bit decent; and look here, Berna, tell Ruth to slip on a clean cap and a white apron before she opens the gate to Mrs. Vince. Who, in the name of wonder, would have thought of her coming down? I wish she had

stayed away. No less than a pair would content her, either;" and so Mrs. Boyle murmured on to space, for Berna had vanished.

Fortune favours the brave. Mrs. Vince could on occasion be very brave, and the fickle goddess rewarded her.

Early on the morning following Mr. Vince's ignominious defeat, she ordered round her brougham and, dressed in rich though plain apparel, drove straight to Cunningham's Hotel. Spite of Mrs. Boyle's verdict, Mrs. Vince was a very handsome woman. Unlike the widow's, her beauty had not faded with the years—quite the contrary; the tints of a somewhat ungenial summer mellowed under a gracious sun of late prosperity into the rich hues of a glorious autumn. She was large, tall, commanding of aspect, dark—though not in the way Mrs. Boyle implied—with blue-black hair coiled into great masses at the back of her head, straight black brows, eyes of the truest, deepest violet, a decided nose, a wide mouth which could expand into a frank, pleasant smile, firm chin, head well poised on a round, shapely throat—a woman

who looked best in sweeping velvets and trailing silks, wrapped up in costly furs, or gathering rich laces round her portly figure.

Armed for conquest, she found no one to conquer—no one but poor Berna, who had been left at home by her mother to see the luggage was not meddled with, and also perhaps by fate in order that Mrs. Vince might see what sort of stuff the girl was made of.

Though young, Berna had served her time in the social workshop, and knew who was who and what was what.

As a kindred spirit, Mrs. Vince surveyed her with astonishment.

"Great heavens!" she thought. "Here is a creature out of whom one might evolve anything—anything. God grant some of my own children may attain to her stature."

True, the girl was timid; but as her shyness proceeded from no lack of breeding, but rather from the misery caused by that constant blister her mother never would allow to close, there were minutes when nature asserted itself, and the true

Berna—who had been so loved by the lonely old lady living in desolate state near Cheltenham, and who had ridden beside her father into the wild fastnesses of Mayo—peeped through the barred windows of the prison-house to which she was, by her own loyal choice, consigned.

For many a weary day, spent in battling with her young vehement grief and listening to her mother's senseless complaints and maundering conversation, she had not spoken to any woman of her own rank in life.

From Mrs. Boyle, as from a plague, even the kindest and most tolerant of her own sex, if well-bred, fled appalled. Sympathy withered in her presence; charity wide enough to consort with sinners, and carry sweet words of hope and help into dark dens of wickedness, could not pardon the faults thrust as virtues in its face.

There was pity for Berna—but "society" felt that daughter could not be dissociated from mother, more especially in a case where the daughter, turning her back on the Boyles, elected to cast in her lot "with that horrible woman."

"Despite her external refinement, there must be a great vein of commonness in the girl, or she never could continue to live with Mrs. Boyle:" so argued the world.

Even before Mr. Boyle's death this was said, and after that accident, which left Berna fatherless, the words were spoken more frequently and with greater emphasis.

"My dear," exclaimed Mrs. Vince, after they had talked on many subjects, "we must be friends. Come and stay at Craigvallen for a time, and let us get thoroughly acquainted."

Then, in a moment, a black, gloomy cloud swept the tender sunshine off Berna's face.

"Thank you," she murmured; "you are very kind; but I do not think—" and as their eyes met she stopped suddenly, while a torrent of painful colour dyed her shamed cheeks and forehead.

For once Mrs. Vince proved unequal to the occasion. She had forgotten—as nearly as possible she had walked into a pitfall of her own digging; but for Berna, she could scarcely have escaped the peril. As it was, the danger had been

too imminent for her instantly to regain self-possession, and she was just considering what kind word she could say that might enable her to back gracefully out of the dilemma, when the door opened, and Mrs. Boyle appeared. Mrs. Boyle, flushed, excited, exhausted, yet still with a certain glow of victory about her whole person, which indicated a belief on her part that she had not again traversed the scenes of her early victories "for nothing." Towards Mrs. Vince her manner was defiant, while familiar.

"I hope you haven't been waiting long," she began, after she had coldly received Mrs. Vince's first friendly advances, and, as she afterwards remarked to her daughter, taught that lady "to keep back a bit." "Berna's not much of a one to talk. As the morning turned out fine, I thought I'd let some of my friends know I had come back again."

"It must be a considerable time since you saw any of them," said Mrs. Vince politely, merely by way of saying something.

"That's true enough; but time wouldn't

make any difference to my friends; friends aren't like relations, you know, ready to turn the cold shoulder the minute they get up in the world. Not but what some of the people I was acquainted with when I was a girl have got on as well as they could desire. There's the Pirns, now," added the widow, turning to Berna, as though that young person had been acquainted from childhood with the celebrated family thus suddenly introduced on the carpet; "Miss Sheill tells me they have got that rich they scarcely know what to do with their money. The uncle has built himself a house fit for any nobleman at Holywood, and they are all living together there till Mr. Pirn gets possession of the estate of Doch-na-Beg, that belonged to the great Dublin barrister Shane Ross. Many a time I've heard my father talk of him, and the way he could turn any witness inside out in less than five minutes. Mr. Pirn has paid for the place long enough ago, but there's an end of a lease or something to run out before he can get possession."

"Doch-na-Beg commands a beautiful view of

the Lough," said Mrs. Vince, seeing Berna was temporarily stricken dumb.

"You need not tell me that," answered Mrs. Boyle. "William Pirn's the man to have everything of the best. That was always his way; and no blame to him either, if he could afford it! I did not see anybody but Miss Sheill, though, Berna. The Whitefords are down at the shore, old Mr. Campbell is not expected to live, and the Dowies have fever in the house. Matilda Sheill wouldn't have been in town herself only she's got a cough you'd be frightened to hear, and is forced to stop in her own room. She *was* glad to see me. She couldn't believe her ears when the servant told her Mrs. Boyle was below. 'Why,' she said, 'you don't look a day older! If it wasn't for the weeds you've on, I'd think you were Milly Vince I had such fine goings-on with at Ballyclare stepped in to see me!' I did not tell her I could not return the compliment. It is astonishing how she has altered. She is not so many years older than me, yet she looks quite a middle-aged woman."

Mrs. Vince felt she could not smile, even mentally, her pity for Berna was so intense.

"But she has lost none of her merry ways," proceeded Mrs. Boyle, who believed she was planting daggers in the heart of Richard's "grand wife" by directing her conversation to Ulick Boyle's daughter; "she's just as heartsome as ever; to have heard us, you'd have thought we weren't more than twelve years old; it was 'Do you mind this?' and 'Have you forgotten that?' We were in fits of laughing all the time, and 'Tilda not able to speak, almost, for the coughing; all her lament was she couldn't help me look for lodgings. O, such a hunt as I've had since I left her—up one street and down another—and the price they ask for the smallest room would eat up our whole income! Never did I come across such a set of harpies—one worse nor another. They all took me for English by my accent; and, indeed, I told one of them, after the extortion I had listened to, I felt ashamed to call myself Irish. Everything extra, for all the world like England, only dirtier. I heard,

though, on my way home, of some decent lodgings in the Ormeau Road, that I'd have gone to see, only I felt my knees giving under me. I was told of them by a crossing-sweeper in Arthur Street, who minded my father well. I asked him "—but what Mrs. Boyle asked, or the gentleman who "minded" her father answered, will never be known on this side heaven, for just at that point the widow suddenly paused; thrust her hand in her pocket; turned first red, then white; and finally, as she afterwards told Miss Sheill, "Let a screech out of her you might have heard up at the New Gaol," which caused Mrs. Vince to start to her feet with more celerity than she had ever before displayed.

"We're done for now, Berna; we're done for now," cried Mrs. Boyle, in a hysterical falsetto. "I'm a lost and ruined woman;" after vouchsafing which lucid explanation she would have rushed down-stairs and into the street had Mrs. Vince not seized her by the shoulder.

"What on earth is the matter?" inquired that lady, almost breathless with surprise and terror.

"It's a matter of two hundred and seventy-eight pounds," screamed Mrs. Boyle, as furiously as if "Richard's wife" had been the thief. "Let me go, I bid you. Why do you hinder me, and my good money lying there out in the street? Let me go, woman. Don't you hear me?" and striking Mrs. Vince's hand a smart blow with her clenched fist, the widow released herself; and, crape strings, which she had unfastened, streaming loose, and shawl falling from her shoulders, fled madly from the room.

"Stay where you are," said Mrs. Vince to Berna, as the girl was about to follow; "you can do no good. She must be at the end of Donegall Street by this time." And then, for the second time, the pair looked straight each in the other's eyes.

Suddenly Berna's steady glance wavered, drooped, fell; for a moment she seemed as if struggling with some cruel pain.

"Sit down, dear," entreated Mrs. Vince, tenderly touching her breast, "and if you want to cry, cry—don't mind me;" and, walking to the

window, she turned her head away from Mrs. Boyle's daughter, and appeared to be looking out upon the street.

But Berna did not want to cry. The fox she carried within her bosom gnawed too fiercely and constantly for tears. To this girl was denied the poor solace even of sympathy, which she had no choice but to thrust aside. All she asked from her fellows was leave to hide the wounds, long and wide, of which that proud and sensitive heart bore the scars through life. Could she have wept and made lament, and confided her trouble to any woman, it had not been the keen dagger she felt piercing her very soul, cutting through each quivering nerve, and stabbing in its most vital part every instinct her birth and training had taught her to respect.

Out of such warp and woof as went to compose her character great women have been made; and Mrs. Vince, who felt she might, but for circumstances over which she had no control, have been a great woman too, admired Berna, when with quiet step she crossed the carpet and said,

"If you do not mind, I think I had better put on my bonnet and see whether I cannot be of some use to mamma."

With that splendid decision which ladies in possession of a handsome income, whose rank is beyond dispute, can on occasion exhibit to some purpose, Mrs. Vince flashed round on the girl, whose only weak point was a finer and more delicate mental organisation than her own.

"You do not know where your mother is," she said; "and if you did, you would not be of any use. What could have induced her to carry such a sum of money about with her?"

"She never mentioned to me she had any money."

"Where do you suppose she got it?"

"I have not an idea," answered Berna, "unless Sir Herbert—" and she flushed crimson.

"I see—I see," commented Mrs. Vince; and she thought for a moment ere adding, "I came here to-day, Berna—I may call you Berna, may I not, child?—to talk over matters and decide what had better be done. It is an utter impossibility

you and your mother can live on sixty pounds a year."

"O, if mamma would only let me go out as a governess or companion!" gasped the girl. "Could you induce her, do you think, Mrs. Vince? You do seem so clever and strong, she might listen to you. I should scarcely care what I did, and I really have been pretty well educated. I can play and sing, and draw and dance, and talk French; and I am able to ride and drive."

"The two latter accomplishments not of much use to a governess, I am afraid," remarked Mrs. Vince, with a smile which hid tears she would not let fill her eyes.

"They might be to a companion though," urged Berna. "Dear Mrs. Vince, if you only —only could induce mamma to let me try, I believe I could make money, and I should only want a little out of my salary for dress; and she might live with some of those friends she talks about. We could be together in the holidays, and I really do not think she would miss me very much."

"Why won't she let you be a governess?" asked Mrs. Vince.

"Because she is afraid it would offend my grandmother, or my great-grandmother, rather. Mamma does so keep on harping about Mrs. Boyle leaving me money; and she won't. She told me herself she had made her will, leaving everything to Sir Herbert; and quite right too," added Berna, with a quite involuntary uplifting of her head. "The money should go with the land."

Mrs. Vince laughed. "From the depths of a bitter experience," she answered, "I can assure you I do not think you will be left anything. All the land and all the money and all the power are sure to be in the hand of a single individual. And now, as I fancy I understand the position pretty clearly, I shall go. Do not let anything tempt you to go in search of your mother. She will return safe and sound. Tell her, if you please, I mean to call quite early to-morrow. Now, good-bye, Berna, and—"

She clasped her arms round the girl's neck, and stood silent.

"And—" questioned Berna, with dumb lips and eloquent eyes rather than with sound.

"Always remember that while I live you have a friend in Marcella Vince. Good-bye now, good-bye! Kiss me, dear. God bless you!" and Mrs. Vince strained Berna to her heart; and then, with veil drawn close, passed down the staircase to her carriage, the door of which an obsequious waiter stood ready to open.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEXT morning Mrs. Vince, armed with great powers, once more alighted at the door of Cunningham's Hotel.

She was received with almost royal honours. Cunningham's felt it a fine feather in its cap to see the wife of Richard Charles Vince, Esq., step across its threshold. Mrs. Vince, as the daughter of that sinful Theoph Carpenter honourably mentioned by Berna's mother, was in her own right a "person," but when she came to lack a five-pound note that fact would not long have availed her. After her marriage, however, Belfast liked to remember she had been "born in the purple."

She reflected a certain glory on business; and the money made out of business conferred a very necessary additional charm on the lady. There were daughters of other dilapidated old families living on narrow incomes, in what they considered

stately poverty, who wondered how Marcella could have stooped so low. But then Mr. Vince had not asked them to preside over his establishment. In such case they might have been persuaded to stoop too. When the picking up of money is in question some people are not unwilling to stoop very low indeed.

At any rate, Mrs. Vince was even more universally respected than her husband. She had raised Richard Charles, stated his admirers, into the sphere for which he was "intended by nature."

"Nature indulges in some queer vagaries," said the malcontents who did not believe in this righteous man. She gave great balls; she patronised concerts, and always presided over a stall when a fashionable bazaar was on the *tapis*. She did not buy her dresses in London or Paris, or even Dublin, but gladdened the hearts of the Belfast shopkeepers and milliners. She was kind to the poor; she kept Richard Charles up to the mark, and made a man of him. At public meetings he felt himself a person of considerable

importance. He was a J.P., and dispensed justice tempered with mercy. When that petition in the Litany relating to magistrates was read each Sunday in Craigvallen Church, Mr. Vince uttered the response very loud indeed, and with considerable emphasis. Though accustomed from his youth to leave the whole service in the minister's hands, and utter nothing save an "Amen" at rare intervals, Mr. Vince had learned to take his part in church, and spoke out audibly, with an idea that he was setting a "good example to the lower orders." He also sang—not very melodiously, but with much fervour. Though he had no voice, he had plenty of money; and the rest of the congregation felt that in his square, well-cushioned pew, filled with hassocks of all sorts and sizes, Richard was the right man in the right place.

To quote the sexton, who handed round the poor-box (an affair like a small warming-pan, with half the lid cut off, attached to a handle long enough to enable the money receptacle to be thrust under the nose of the most distant wor-

shipper), as much as five shillings was "lifted" every Sabbath morning out of the Craigvallen pew; and on "collecting days they all give gold, down to the youngest child!"

Mr. Vince felt his to be a very valuable life, and it was for this reason, and not because he realised in the smallest degree he was truly a miserable sinner, and required mercy, that he prayed so devoutly for a body of which at Craigvallen he was the solitary representative.

"Has Mrs. Boyle heard any tidings of her purse?" asked the wife of this great man, as she followed the waiter, who slowly preceded her up the staircase.

"No, Mrs. Boyle has heard nothing of her purse, ma'am," answered the waiter, pausing in his ascent so as to allow time for the fashionable lady's still more leisurely pace.

"That is very sad," observed Richard Charles' wife, and though she did not feel sorry she looked grave.

"Very sad, indeed, ma'am," replied the waiter, after the exchange of which amenities

and confidences he threw the door of Mrs. Boyle's sitting-room wide.

What he said turned out to be too true; the widow had heard nothing of her money, and "what's more," she added, "the police"—which word she pronounced as if the accent were on the first syllable—"don't think I ever will. It was in Bank of Ireland notes; and they say by the time I can find out the numbers they'll be changed into gold—ay, and spent, too, maybe."

"But did you not telegraph to Dublin to stop payment?"

"And me without a farthing of money in the wide world, and 'Tilda Sheill hadn't as much as five shillings she could lend me, and you gone when I got back here, and your husband left his office for the day, and the people here saying it would be of no good telegraphing because the bank would be shut! Ah, it's easy to talk! If you'd been running round the town like me, out of your senses with trouble, you'd know better than ask such a question as that."

"Surely, however, you have done something? —written to the bank, for example."

"Berna has. I told her it was just throwing away a stamp, and we'd none to spare; but, of course, she knew best. Like yourself, she thinks she's cleverer than anybody else. You'll see, though, if any good comes of it."

"What do you intend to do now?" asked Mrs. Vince.

"Indeed, you may just do what you like with me. Take me on a car to the old poor-house and leave me there, or let me lie out on some doorstep till I'm dead with starvation and exposure. Maybe your husband would for very shame provide me a plain funeral. He surely wouldn't like it to be said his own cousin was buried as a pauper."

"Your mother takes a very gloomy view of affairs," observed Mrs. Vince, turning to Berna, whose contribution to the conversation so far had been *nil*.

"Her mother would like to be told what she has left to make her take a bright view of any-

thing?" interrupted Mrs. Boyle; "with the money gone that was all stood between me and destitution, I think I have good cause for gloom. Me and 'Tilda Sheill had settled how we'd start a sort of boarding-house for young gentlemen. She knows lots of clerks would have been proud to come. 'Tilda's a wonderful hand at cooking—you should have tasted the apple cakes she used to make!—and she says she's as good and quick as ever she was; so she could have seen to the dinners. She has got her wits about her. She planned it all in less than ten minutes. I was to see the rooms were kept straight and do the marketing and receive visitors, and we laid it out that Berna should do most of the sewing, and play and sing and make the evenings a bit lively; and then, after a while, perhaps some of the lodgers might have taken a fancy to her. As unlikely things have come to pass. There's no accounting for the girls that take a man's eye."

Mrs. Vince darted a quick glance in the direction of the young person whose future had been sketched out thus agreeably, and beheld Berna

staring, with parted lips and horror-stricken expression, at her mother—the whole pleasing programme being evidently as new to her as to the lady of Craigvallen.

"I would never have done that, mamma," she said, with a firm ring in her voice Mrs. Vince had not before noticed.

"Indeed, miss; and what would you have done?"

"I do not know. Gone out as governess, or servant even, rather than live such a life as that amongst a number of young men."

"You're wonderfully set against young men. It is to be hoped the old ones won't be set against you."

The girl did not answer. She had uttered her protest, and now relapsed into silence, while Mrs. Boyle rambled on recounting some delightful reminiscences of various Peters and Pats and Cons, who had all, if her own account might be believed, fallen under the spell of her beauty, and "gone to the bad," or "taken to drink," or married "out of spite," or "shot themselves

through the forehead," because she "wouldn't have a word to say to them."

From this ramble through the days departed she suddenly returned to the present.

"It's little I thought then," she said, "I'd ever be as I am now—left at the mercy of the world, without a creature to stand up for me, or say as much as 'Here's a pound to you, Milly.'"

"Still, you are not utterly destitute."

"I suppose you will tell me next three of us can live on sixty pounds a year! I'll go bail you pay your gardener the double of that, and find him a house, maybe, into the bargain, to say nothing of coals and potatoes. But, of course, you've a right to do what you like with your own, only let me be a warning to you. Never put it in the power of any living man to leave you penniless. If you do, grand as you are now, the day'll likely come you may want even a 'bap,' and find yourself not able to buy one."

"What a terrible picture you draw, Mrs. Boyle! You seem to have the lowest opinion of men."

"I've not been treated the way to make me have a high opinion of them. First of all, my own husband dying in debt, and not leaving a penny, so to speak, between me and destitution; and then, when in the fulness of my heart I come back, thinking to hear a kind word spoken, my father's brother's son as good as says, 'You're not fit even to sit under the dinner-table, like those Kings without thumbs mentioned in the Bible. Get off! I won't have you near me.' He might find me near him yet, when he least expects it."

"My husband is a little peculiar," deprecated Mrs. Vince.

"You needn't tell me that. I knew him before ever you did, when neither he nor his father was much to boast of—or much thought of, if you come to that."

"He is a self-made man," went on Mrs. Vince, without showing even a trace of white feather, "and as such, perhaps, attaches somewhat undue value to the possession of wealth and the externals of rank. But his heart is sound, Mrs. Boyle;

and I am sure, if you would only take him the right way, he could be induced in this extremity to help you."

"The right way! Why, I took him fifty—ay, a hundred—ways; and I might just as well have been talking to Macarthy's Fort. Ah! if ever a man was hardened by the things of this world, that man's name is Richard Charles Vince. And what will they do for him in the long-run? that is all I'd like to know. You may put silver and gold on his coffin, but he can't carry silver and gold with him into the next world, no matter what part of it he's bound for."

"That's very true, indeed," said the better half of Richard Charles Vince; "but whilst my husband is here, and in the command of money, do you not think it would be politic on your part to conform a little to his wishes? I see no reason to doubt but that he might be induced to add to your income if you would only concede something to his prejudices."

"Concede! Why, there never was so soft and yielding a creature as myself. As my poor

father used to say, 'You're for all the world like hot butter, Milly; there's no knowing where to take hold of you.' O, he was the funny man! I think I can see him sitting by the fire telling some of his stories now."

With exemplary patience, Mrs. Vince, while declining to be drawn into any argument concerning the wit and wisdom of Vince senior, so happily deceased, led the widow on and on, till at length she contrived to get that lady into a corner, when she was forced to make full confession on the subject of ways and means. To extract anything from Mrs. Boyle she did not wish to tell was a proceeding fraught not merely with difficulty but danger—difficulty, because she could scarcely be pinned to any point; danger, for the reason that her reprisals were of the most nasty and unexpected nature. But Mrs. Vince had not steered her course amongst this world's sunken rocks and perilous shoals for nothing.

If the widow's retorts sometimes were hard to bear, her opponent smiled even while wincing. Mrs. Boyle could not taunt, or daunt, or cow her

into retreat. Always the same calm and unbroken hollow square, always a bristling bayonet ready for use at a moment's notice, always a cool, unmoved front. Mrs. Boyle, at length, was well-nigh crying with vexation; while Berna, though torn with shame and grief, could not but admire the consummate address with which Mrs. Vince surely, if slowly, advanced upon the widow's outposts, and captured them one by one, putting each entrenchment behind her as she marched triumphantly on, just as a good chess-player lays aside his captured pieces.

At the last, Mrs. Vince said, in her suavest accent,

"You really do seem in a position of considerable difficulty, my dear Mrs. Boyle. Let me see if I quite understand; correct me, please, if I am wrong. There is your annuity, the first payment of which will not be due until November. Beyond that you have nothing; no money, no furniture, very little jewelry, no friend, except my husband, likely to prove of use at such a juncture. You see it is best to look matters

straight in the face. Immediately after your husband's death you wrote to the Dowager, as you call her, explaining the position fully, and requesting help. For answer, she sent the family solicitor to represent her at the funeral, and authorised him to give you fifty pounds—it was fifty, I think—and an intimation she would do no more for you—"

"Not if I went down on my bended knees," added Mrs. Boyle.

"Something to that effect, if not conveyed in exactly such terse language," said Mrs. Vince. "Then Sir Herbert Boyle, after stating he was not bound to give you sixpence, handed you two hundred and fifty pounds to—I forget the exact consideration."

"Be shut of me," explained Mrs. Boyle, with an awful candour.

"And he further agreed to pay such household bills as might be outstanding, and the cost of your and Berna's mourning—don't cover your face, child; old women like your mother and myself must be practical, you know."

"Old women!" cried Mrs. Boyle. "If you choose to talk of yourself as old, I'm sure I've no objection; but do not put me in the same boiling, if you please."

"Very sincerely I beg your pardon, and will amend my phrase. *Young* women, then, like you and myself, ought to have sense enough to look circumstances in the face. To sum up, you have lost all the money sent you by Mrs. and Sir Herbert Boyle, less your travelling and hotel expenses, and there is no source from which you can reasonably expect fresh supplies till November, which supplies will then be of the most meagre description."

"While you are rolling in riches," said Mrs. Boyle.

"Which we have certainly not taken from you," retorted Mrs. Vince, equal to that or any other occasion. "And now, on certain recognised lines, I may tell you that both my husband and myself desire to make your lot a little pleasanter. We will talk the situation over, and consider what we can do. Meantime, as you must

be short of money, do not be vexed with me for leaving five pounds; and while you stop here have everything, in moderation, you may require. I feel quite sure Mr. Vince will pay your bill."

And so, in fact, to cut a very long conversation short, Mrs. Vince departed, empowered to execute terms of almost unqualified submission on the part of that too fascinating person, Mrs. Boyle, if only Richard Charles would agree to make things a "bit better for her."

Mrs. Vince did not again delight Cunningham's with her presence; instead, she wrote a letter to Mrs. Boyle, which that lady characterised as her "death warrant." On certain conditions, Mr. Vince professed himself willing to pay his cousin's rent, and, in addition, allow her forty pounds a year. Further, Theoph Carpenter's daughter thought enough furniture could be spared from Craigvallen to render the cottage her husband had in view habitable.

"And that's all," commented Mrs. Boyle, "a man just wallowing in money can do for his own flesh and blood. Well, some day it'll maybe

come home to him, and then he'll think of the way he treated me. Now, just take a pen in your hand, Berna, and write to the man; I'm that poor and miserable, I must accept whatever terms are offered me. Lord only knows where this place is they mean to put us; and I'm very sure Richard Vince doesn't care what it's like. And you saw, Berna, what *she* says—that if I agree to Mr. Vince's terms—*Mister*, indeed!—we're to move without delay. That's to save the hotel bill. If I'd money enough I'd just order my winding-sheet at once, and have done with everything."

It was in this pleasant frame of mind that Mrs. Boyle entered upon the occupancy of Clear Stream Cottage. Mr. Vince knew the place well. He had been acquainted with that previous tenant, esteemed by Mr. Muir, who converted a howling wilderness of neglected kitchen-garden, full of cabbage-stumps, weeds, stones, and old shoes, kettles, broken delft, and refuse of all sorts into a smiling paradise, and considered it a suitable residence for the impoverished Mrs. Boyle.

"You will be near your friends the Pirns," suggested Mrs. Vince pleasantly, as she sat *tête-à-tête* with the widow. "Holywood is within a walk from here."

Mrs. Boyle shook her head. "It's little walking I'll do," she said. "The best thing for me would be to gather a pile of sticks and set alight to myself, as the widows do out in India."

Not even the most genial of women could long have supported conversation conducted on such lines; and after she had for the fourth time inquired whether there were any other little thing which could be sent from Craigvallen likely to render the house more comfortable, and on each occasion being compelled to listen to a long tirade concerning the shortcomings of Ulick Boyle, the perfections of Millicent, relict of that unfeeling personage, and the tendency of most people, when they "get up a bit in the world," to "forget themselves," Marcella, daughter of Theophilus Carpenter, deceased, remarked she had no idea it was so late, and rose to go.

In the tiny hall she met Berna.

"I was gathering some flowers for you," said the girl. "Are they not sweet?" and she gave Mrs. Vince a bouquet, which that lady accepted with a smile.

"What's the use of sending such simple things to Craigvallen, Berna?" asked her mother; "they'll be reckoned nothing better than common weeds in that grand place. Just throw them on the road, Mrs. Vince, when you get outside; it'll save you the trouble of bidding your servants put them to the back of the kitchen fire."

"They shall certainly not go there," said the lady thus advised. "I mean to take them with me to a dinner-party this evening—and think of the giver often," she added in a lower tone to Berna.

Happily for all concerned, Mrs. Boyle declined to accompany her guest to the garden-gate.

"The sun would be sure to 'peel' my face," she was good enough to explain. "I don't know how you can go driving about, Mrs. Vince, without a bit of veil, or even a parasol; but to be sure

that's one advantage you swarthy people have over us fair—you don't tan."

"No," answered the wife of Richard Charles, with unruffled good-humour, "I don't tan. Do you?" she added, turning to Berna. "No; then walk with me to the phaeton."

They walked together along the path leading to the narrow bridge, beneath which the stream rippled joyously on its way, and then through a mimic plantation of broom, syringa, gum-cistus, sumach, and roses.

"What a darling little place!" said Mrs. Vince. "I hope you like it?"

"Very, very much; particularly after that dreadful town."

"You must come and stay at Craigvallen;" but Berna shook her head.

"Could we not persuade your mother to do without you even for a week?"

"It is not that," hesitated the girl. "But it would not be right; I should not like—"

"To visit us unless your mother were invited also. Is that what you mean?"

"Yes, that is what I mean."

"You are again quite right. I beg your pardon;" and nothing more was said on the subject.

In the lane, close by the rustic gate, stood a groom, in front of as pretty a pair of cream-coloured cobs as the heart of woman need have desired to possess.

"What beauties!" exclaimed Berna, passing her hand caressingly over the hog's mane of the creature nearest to her.

"What a pity!" thought Mrs. Vince, as she looked at the slight girlish figure, at the well-poised head, with its wealth of glossy hair, the pure fair face, and the eyes divinely, deeply, darkly blue, and considered the mother to whom Berna was tied till death parted them.

At that moment a man, mounted on a stout roan horse—which he managed with much more ease than any one might have expected, from his loose build, long limbs, and generally awkward appearance—passed by, and bestowed a thoroughly critical and appreciative glance upon the Craigvallen turn-out.

Holding his reins and a heavy cutting whip in one hand, he touched his hat with the other—not out of deference to the two ladies, but from respect to Mr. Vince's money.

"What an extraordinary-looking person!" said Mrs. Vince, turning a backward glance after him. "Who is he?"

"That is Mr. Muir," answered Berna, "the landlord of Clear Stream Cottage—*a dreadful person.*"

CHAPTER IX.

HAVING renewed that long-interrupted acquaintance with the author of his being—"Come to the knowledge of three strange sisters," as Miss Bell very truly remarked—turned his horse out to grass in one of the pleasant meadows lying down by the river, unpacked his effects and stowed them away in a roomy cupboard assigned to his use, Mr. Gorman Muir "took himself off" to Derry, in which maiden city there resided a gentleman, called Baird, he had frequently met in Kilkenny, who would, he hoped, help him to obtain that post so universally coveted by various impecunious and incapable persons in Ireland—viz. an agency.

He was too old for the constabulary; he knew his chance of getting that vague "something under Government"—also a pitfall in the way of Irish youth and enterprise—was of the slenderest;

but he felt sure he should make a capital agent.

He liked riding, driving, shooting, dining out, dancing, and the best society. He could sing a good song; tell a good story. He had been popular amongst the poor down in Kilkenny, and he believed he could get rent easily enough out of men bred and born in Ulster. Yes, an agency was the very thing. He would be almost his own master, and yet in the receipt of a fair salary. If it were necessary for him to work at all—and the young man could not close his eyes to the painful truth that such a misfortune was imminent—nothing could suit his abilities and temperament better than the management of a large estate.

He had not conceived the idea more than three days; he had but just taken his ticket at the York Street Terminus in Belfast, yet already that jade, Imagination, was at her old tricks. No experience seemed able to protect the young man from her. Over and over again he found nothing save disappointment and confusion ensue

from her antics. Nevertheless, once again she had him safely on her back, and only waited opportunity to take the bit between her teeth and bolt with this bold rider—over "bank, bush, and scaur;" through thorn and through water, till she at last found a convenient spot in which to throw him ignominiously into some black bog or quagmire which seemed bottomless.

To many minds, however, there is such a pleasure in the mad pace she goes and the wild excitement men can never know, save when following the lead of fancy in full flight, that they would compound for a good deal of disaster at the "finish" for the sake of the stretching gallop and the rattling pace after that wiliest of wily foxes—Possibility.

Mr. Gorman Muir, at all events, enjoyed his "spin" through fairyland. Having once quite decided an agency would suit him, and that he would suit an agency, nothing more remained to do save to settle the sort of agency he should prefer, and the smallest amount of salary he would condescend to receive. A small and highly

cultivated estate he thought could scarcely give him sufficient scope. He wanted something with great tracts of mountain, and heath, and moor—with darkling lakes, the existence of which was unknown, save to the inhabitants—something where other men had failed to win love and confidence or woo prosperity—wide expanses of land, where the houses of hospitable and primitive gentry, possessed of pretty daughters and sons who "feared nothing and were willing to go at anything," were sparsely scattered—where the Atlantic thundered in upon the coast, and the original stunted and red-haired Irish Celt, who could speak no English, was still to be stalked.

The man was nearly eight-and-twenty, yet romance was as strong in him as in a school-boy. He devoutly believed in Tom Burke of Ours and the doings of Charles O'Malley. "The Collegians" woke a responsive echo in his soul—and he could sing the song, "A place in thy memory dearest," with such mournful pathos that old ladies wept, and at the same time with such seductive tender-

ness that young ladies felt they could almost have gone off with him on the spot. He was full of daring and poetry. "The Charge at Fontenoy" thrilled his very soul. He felt more than half-rebel when he read the short and stirring story of that gallant, if mistaken, band of "United Irish" gentlemen who paid the penalty of their lives for their patriotism; but when he turned back the page of Irish history to the siege of Derry he felt he saw written there a grander narrative still—of endurance as well as courage—a tale of well-nigh incredible patience and persistent fortitude England seems always to have considered it rather "good form" to ignore. As some men live before their time, so Gorman Muir was living after his. Not one of Sir Walter Scott's novels but appealed to something within him that only echoed to the strain of wild adventure, the clang of armour, and the sound of martial music. He was one left over, as it might have seemed, by mistake from a generation long dead and gone, and yet with a love of pleasure and a capacity for settling to no work, and a thorough

enjoyment in idleness which is the proud possession of the nineteenth century.

Such as he was, however, he had won his father's heart. Once again he could see in the flesh Katty Gorman's eyes shining like stars—dark, merry, dancing, wicked eyes. Not a tone, or gesture, or movement of the son but reminded him of that dead mother her "family" had rejected in life, but whose body they reluctantly received when it mattered little to her what became of it. Himself suspicious, mean, hard, calculating, he liked Gorman, because the young fellow was unworldly, generous, impressionable, and open-hearted.

"And I'm very sure, for all he says, that he's got a spice of the devil in him," considered Mr. Muir, as though that were the crowning grace a man might aspire to possess.

That he lacked the lighter accomplishment of *persiflage*, possessed to such perfection by Ensign Ludham, was a fault the farmer felt willing to condone.

"He hasn't just such pleasant talk," con-

sidered Mr. Muir; "but there's a heap more in what he says," which was indeed quite true. Just at that time Mr. Gorman Muir's utterances contained a depth of bitterness and a knowledge of the worst side of human nature Solomon himself in his most *blasé* moments might have envied.

"It's to be hoped he will soon get something to do," observed Miss Muir, about ten days after Gorman's departure, "for I'm sure he'll never bear himself here. Of all the restless men I ever did come across, he's about the worst. A young chicken wanting its mother couldn't seem less content than he does."

"Maybe if you had been cast out into the wilderness like a second Ishmael you mightn't be just content either," said Mr. Muir.

"I'm very certain, if he had behaved himself, his uncle wouldn't have turned him from the door," persisted the lady, who still knew nothing of the real cause of quarrel between Gorman and Mr. Trevasson. "It doesn't stand to sense a man well on in life will put up with being told he's

not to marry by one he has fed and seen to from a child."

"I don't say anything against that, Bell. I might one fine morning want to get married myself, and I'd take it ill if anybody was to say, 'There are fools enough in the world; don't you make one more.' The man, as you remark, had a clear right to marry if he liked; but I don't consider it was either right or just to send one about his business that he had brought up like his son."

"I'm very sure he would never have done anything of the sort if Gorman had behaved himself," repeated Miss Muir.

"I don't see any call you have to say Gorman didn't behave himself. Though he wasn't over fond of the new mistress, he would have left her alone, if she'd have left him. Of course we know all she wants is the old man's money; but the old man ought to have considered he had brought the boy up 'delicately,' as you've heard read out in Proverbs, without trade or profession whereby to earn his living; and I say it is hard on Gorman

to be cast adrift at his age, and forced to buckle to work, after having had his hands kept soft and white like a lady's all his life long."

"Gorman's everything to you now," sneered the amiable Bell.

"I wouldn't go so far as to say he's everything, but he's a good deal," answered Mr. Muir.

"I'm not a bit surprised. That's only what was to be expected. But if you'd been less taken up with him and able to afford time to look about you at some goings on near home it might have been telling you."

"If anything was going on near home, Bell, it concerned me to know, you ought to have spoken."

"O, I can't be expected to have eyes and ears for the whole house."

"All I want at this minute is your tongue. What is it I ought to have been looking after? Who is it you deem is stealing from me now?"

"I'm not aware that I said anybody was stealing from you, though I did notice yesterday a bag of cruffles set up against the back gate. I bid

Isaac empty them out on the heap; and they were the very pick of the potatoes."

"You gave Nally, then, the trouble of sorting them all out again," retorted Mr. Muir; "for I bid him take three or four stone of the finest he could find over to Mr. Garnsey. He has a wonderful 'conceit' of the Ardilaw cruffles."

"He has a wonderful conceit of anything he can get for nothing," amended Bell.

"So maybe," said Mr. Muir, harking back to the original question. "That other matter you've on your mind mightn't turn out of much more consequence than the potatoes."

"It might not," answered his daughter, in a tone which implied she meant precisely the opposite.

"Well, well, whatever it is, let's hear; we'll never get at the rights of the affair till you tell me what it is. Has it do with the fresh tenants at the cottage?"

"No, it has nothing to do with the fresh tenants at the cottage; though I make no doubt there will be plenty to do with them before we're much older. As I remarked a minute ago, you've

been so taken up with Gorman, and Gorman's horse, and Gorman's plans, and Gorman all the rest, you could not see what was going on under your own eyes. From the first I gave you as plain a warning as I could; but, of course, nothing I say is ever thought worth listening to."

"For the Lord's sake say what you've got to say, and have done with it. What's going wrong now? It can't be Carline—"

"No, to be sure it can't be Carline!" mocked Miss Muir. "You thought, I suppose, when you sent the last of the Ensign's luggage to Belfast, you had sent the harm he had done away with his bags and trunks."

"What harm did the man do?"

"O, if you want telling just like a child it is no use coming to me! I suppose you'll make out next you didn't know he'd filled Carline's empty head so full of nonsense she's never been one bit of use since he came into the house; she thinks he's going to make a lady of her, and that some day soon she'll be driving in her carriage drawn by four galloping horses like the Marchioness. If it

wasn't for me you think so little of, she might have been off with him for all anybody would have known. You forget, I'm thinking, there's such a thing as a mail car passes the end of this road twice a day."

"Do you mean that the Ensign sends her letters?"

"And that she sends the Ensign back letters."

"I think you're under some mistake, Bell," hinted the farmer mildly. "No letters have come to this house for Carline. Gorman, as you know, went to the office every morning of his life while he was here, and it has so chanced since he left us I've been often passing that road and called in myself to see whether Mr. Liggett had anything for us."

"I know you were that anxious for news from Gorman you went to the post before there was time for a letter to come from him," scoffed Miss Muir. "And I know something more: that an old woman, I've told you over and over again, came about the house for no good, lives near Craigantlet. She's able enough to walk to the village, and she doesn't forget to call here as she goes and

comes back, I'll warrant you. It'll not be long before you see her, or I'm much mistaken. Carline's writing a letter to him now."

"Where is she?" asked Mr. Muir, taking a step forward and then stopping.

"She's in the kitchen. I knew she had something in her mind this morning, she was so anxious to get up by herself into Gorman's room. I thought I'd put a stop to that, and set her to mind the apple-jam. I dared her to leave it one minute; so what she's doing is writing a note on the bellows. She slipped the paper and pencil into her pocket as I passed through, and pretended to be afraid the fire was getting too low."

"If I could just make sure of it," said the farmer, with a set look on his stern face.

"Why don't you make sure of it, then? You'll do more harm than good if you say anything to Carline; she'd have the note in the fire before you could look at her. She *is* a sly young cat."

"You are positive, Bell, Nanny Gribben 's the go-between?"

"Hasn't she bought herself a new stuff dress?

and didn't I see the silk square Mrs. Sinton bought Carline last Easter, pinned round Nancy's throat?"

Mr. Muir groaned at what he could but consider confirmation strong as Holy Writ. It was Miss Muir's hour of triumph, and she did not understand the meaning of mercy.

"Am I positive?" she said, quoting her father's question with fine effect; "yes, I am as positive as I am that I know why Gorman wouldn't go to meeting with us."

"You are aware, Bell," suggested Mr. Muir, now quite cowed, "his uncle brought him up Church."

"O yes, I'm aware; and he was going to church till I said, in joke, I'd as soon go to one place as another, and that nobody could get any harm by listening to old Mr. Crommles. I did it to try my gentleman; for I had no more intention of going with him than of flying; but, if you remember, he did not go to church here, then or since—walking off to Comber, and Holywood, and Castlereagh. He was ashamed to be seen out

with us; that's what comes of one of a family being brought up with notions above the rest."

Having fired which shot, Miss Muir departed to pursue those domestic vocations in which she shone as signally as in playing the congenial part of private detective.

Left to himself, Mr. Muir strolled down the avenue and out into the lane. There he lounged about for some time, after which he reëntered the gate, closing it behind him.

Presently there came down the hill an elderly woman, decently dressed, carrying a covered basket on her arm. As if just arriving on the scene, Mr. Muir sauntered forth, and accosted her with,

"Well, Nanny, and how's all with you to-day?"

She gave him a little bobbing curtsy, thanked him kindly, and said "all" was pretty well.

"You looked in as you passed, I suppose?"

Yes; Mrs. Gribben had looked in.

"Did you see any of my daughters?"

Mrs. Gribben had only seen Miss Carline. She was making the beautifullest apple-jam; but

then, to be sure, the Ardilaw apples had always been famous.

"How did you think she was looking?"

"Her face was all scorched up standing over the fire."

"And writing a letter you're taking to the post for her. I want that letter, Nanny. Better stop, and rest yourself a minute."

They had reached a point where a small stream meandered beneath the lane, and a low stone parapet protected the road on each side.

"Put down your basket," proceeded Mr. Muir. "It's fine and heavy; you ought to have something worth while in it."

The woman did not answer as she obeyed; she was white to her lips.

"Now you can give me that letter. I know who it's to; but I want to know what it's about, and I do not mean to stand arguing the matter with you. Hand out that letter, or I'll take you straight down to the barracks, and see what the sergeant will say to the things you've got in your basket."

"I've nothing, Mr. Muir—I've nothing, I'll take my gospel oath, but a few apples Miss Carline gave me to—"

"We'll see about that. Come along; the police will soon make you give up that letter."

"You can have the letter, Mr. Muir; but don't damage me, or be cross with the girl; she's—"

"Hold your tongue!" said Mr. Muir, pocketing the letter. "Now open that basket. Well, you have got a fine assortment of my property, I must confess—eggs, oats, whetstone, and curry-comb. Why, I blamed Isaac for taking the dandy brush last week. As I'm going back to the house, I can carry the curry-comb and whetstone in my hand. You may keep the eggs and the oats, if you send no word to my daughter about what has passed between us. Her lover shall get his letter safe enough, never fear—after I've had a look over it. And now mind my last word, Nanny: if ever I catch you inside my place again, it'll be worse for you."

Having uttered which dark threat, the farmer retraced his steps, never once looking back to the spot where Mrs. Gribben stood shaking her fist after him.

CHAPTER X.

THE following evening Mr. Muir announced his intention of next day repairing to Belfast. "So, if there's anything you want brought out, Bell," he added, "you'd best tell me before bed-time, as I'll be starting early."

It was in accordance with this arrangement that Carline had the satisfaction of seeing her parent drive off in his old-fashioned gig (bought a bargain), the jingling of which could be heard half a mile away. Never did music sound sweeter in the ear of any girl than the rattling of those loose spokes did to Carline as she ran into the house and hurried over her morning tasks, and afterwards, singing carelessly, passed through the front door, which stood wide, and strolled in the direction of the river. Once out of sight of any window, she quickened her steps and walked quickly up the glen till she reached a spot

where the banks were high and the trees thick. Then she made her way down a winding foot-path to the bed of the stream, and, standing quite still, listened.

Instead of being but four miles distant, Belfast might have lain four hundred from the spot where she stood; not a sound, save the rustling of the leaves and the low murmur of the stream, broke the silence. It was noon of a glorious August day. Over the fields lay an utter stillness. Even the cattle lay at rest, chewing the cud lazily; the gorse-hedges on the hillsides were sheets of golden splendour; down where Carline stood nut-trees grew thick. The girl put out her hand and gathered a leaf; then she dropped it into the stream, and saw it float gently away. In fancy she followed it till it reached Strangford Lough.

"I spent a happy day there once," she thought, "when I was a child. But I am happier now than I was then." And she lifted her eyes, which were full of a tender love-light, and looked up into the azure vault above her head.

She would have made a fair picture as she stood there beside the trickling water, with the trees bending down as if longing to touch her cheeks, their branches at times interlacing across the glen. She was young and foolish, and had not, perhaps, much in her; but she was beautiful. She had looked in the glass, and thought there was not anybody so pretty in the country, no girl with such long dark lashes, and eyes that —so said the Ensign—were deep and unfathomable as Glendalough! When she unbound her hair it fell almost to her knees; the Ensign had seen it loose in this way once, by accident, and she felt ashamed. For ever afterwards he raved about that hair. Poor little girl; poor, simple, silly little woman, who believed she needed nothing beyond dress, and jewels, and a carriage, and servants to be as fine a lady as any that ever went to Court! She stood there patiently waiting for her lover, and wondering which way he would come; and while she waited and wondered, her lover stole softly upon her from behind, and caught her in his arms.

"Dear good Carline—best, kindest Carline!" he said, as the girl, clinging to him, convulsively murmured, with passionate affection,

"I am so glad! I *am* so glad!"

"Glad are you, darling? Then you have missed me a little."

"A little!" she repeated. "O, I have thought such long for you! The days seemed as if they never *would* go by."

"You are the sweetest, you are the dearest, the loveliest little soul!" exclaimed young Ludham, emphasising each term of endearment with the full stop, for which grammar has no equivalent, that seems to those uninterested in the text the height of folly.

"I was so afraid I mightn't be able to give Bell the slip," said the girl shyly, her Irish idiom sounding very pretty; and her manner, though countrified, coy and feminine, and, beyond all, utterly guileless.

"And how is the dear Bell?" he asked, drawing Carline once again close to him.

"Bell has nothing to complain of, thank you,

Ensign," at this juncture interpolated a perfectly unexpected voice; "and she'll be proud, I make no doubt, to think you've kept a memory of her in your mind. You needn't disturb yourself. You had a hold of my daughter's waist a minute ago. You can keep your arm where it was if you like, for me."

"I assure you, Mr. Muir—"

"You needn't trouble yourself. I'm sure of all I want to be sure concerning. There's no call for you to put yourself about, Ensign. Unless I'm greatly mistaken, my daughter's not the first you've made love to, any more than she'll be the last. I think, though, you have, maybe, made a bit of a mistake, which it might be as well to rectify before we go further."

"I fear I scarcely follow you, Mr. Muir," stammered the officer, for once unequal to the occasion.

"That's all a pity; but I'll try to make my meaning clear. Don't run away, Carline," added the farmer, laying a grip of iron on his daughter. "I want you to hear all the pleasant talk, girl,

your sweetheart and myself are going to have together. I mean to go a piece back with you, Ensign. You won't mind that, I hope?"

"How could you think otherwise?" murmured the Ensign, who, if he failed to grasp the beauty of the Irish idiom as well from the mouth of a man as from the honey-laden lips of a girl, could at least hazard a conjecture as to what was coming.

"You may remember"—and there was an unconscious dignity in Mr. Muir's gaunt, ungainly figure as he stood beside the river, with the arching branches above his head and the sunlight streaming through the leaves and flickering upon his hard-set features, looking straight at the man who would have done him the cruellest wrong one person can inflict upon another—"a day when you were out with the stag-hounds, and got staked instead of your horse?"

"My memory is not so short for kindness, Mr. Muir," the Ensign was beginning; but Mr. Muir motioned him to keep silence, and proceeded,

"It so happened I was driving past, and, without knowing who you were or what you were —except a young English officer, far from your home, a stranger in a strange country—I brought you to Ardilaw, as there was not a house at hand where you could have been properly done by—"

"Is it necessary to go on heaping coals of fire upon my head?" asked the young sinner.

"It is. If you had minded what the book out of which you got those words tells you, I should not have found you standing with your arm about my daughter. I want to say nothing concerning gratitude, or anything of that sort. What we did, we did without thought of fee or reward. As you know, you offered to pay, and your mother offered to pay; and I said I'd take nothing. Money could not have bought the heart and the will with which we did for you when you could do nothing for yourself. In your father's house you might have got better lodging and richer food, but you could have had no more careful nursing than you got when you were that bad

you could not lift a cup to your lips or turn yourself in your bed."

"Have you no pity?"

"Not a bit for one like you. We thought nothing of what we did; we asked nothing; we took nothing. I never looked for gratitude any more than I looked for wrong. I never deemed the young fellow I took to for his good looks and pleasant ways—you were, beyond ordinary, patient and considerate for a sick man—would try to bring disgrace upon me. I'd have knocked any one down that had evened such a thing to you in my hearing—I would," and the farmer's brow knit and his voice deepened and trembled as the rage surging within him tried to break the bounds he had set for it.

"Mr. Muir—"

"My daughter ought to have been to you, in a manner, like your own sister. No lady in the land was entitled to more respect at your hands. If she had been light and flighty—which my girl never was—it would have been your place to keep her at arm's length sooner than give her an hour's

heartache. My God!" suddenly cried out the man in a voice hoarse with passion, "I could find it in my heart to strike you dead where you stand when I think of the depth you would have dragged her down to before you flung her off as you might a glove."

"Upon my soul, you wrong me. You are quite mistaken—"

"Mistaken, am I? Then I humbly beg your pardon. It was only, you see, my want of conceit led me astray. I didn't think, I didn't really, that you wanted to marry my daughter. She's not ill-looking; but she has no fortune that you would account a fortune; and I did not possess the money, even if I had wanted to do such a thing, to give her the education you've been used to among those you've consorted with. Such things needn't trouble me, though, if they don't trouble you. She's quick enough, and she'll soon learn something of the ways of those above her. Why did you not come and ask me long ago? I'd have made no objection. She is promised, as you know, to a decent man's son; but we

will get over that some way. Ladies jilt their lovers, so I am told. Why wouldn't a farmer's daughter take a better offer when she could get it?"

The officer stood silent. Speech failed him.

"You're not so ready as I've heard you, Ensign," said Mr. Muir; "the prospect of such happiness makes you dumb. When is it to be? No need to stop for the wedding garments. 'A bonny bride,' you know, 'is soon buskit,' and Carline is as bonny a girl as a man need wish to marry, though I say it."

"Mr. Muir—"

"Yes, Mr. Muir's listening; what have you got to say to him?"

"May I speak to you for a minute or two, alone?"

"Not without my daughter. It's the right of the girl you want to make your wife she should hear what we are talking about."

"Well, then, Mr. Muir, you must be quite aware I am totally dependent upon my father. I have not a shilling beyond my pay, except the

amount he allows me; and should I marry without his consent—"

"I quite comprehend; you needn't say another word. You want to be married privately. I have no objection. Of course I should have preferred the whole thing to be open and aboveboard; still, you know your father best, and I make no doubt you're right not to cross him. Take her as quietly as you like. There are plenty of churches in Belfast. Get a license, and I'll drive her up some morning, and nobody need be a bit the wiser. Why, that doesn't seem to please you either, Ensign. Hadn't you better speak out plain, and tell the girl and me what's on your mind?"

"You are totally mistaken, Mr. Muir," said Ensign Ludham, now fairly at bay. "You must be perfectly well aware that in all ranks a man may have a flirtation with a pretty girl, and yet—"

"Go on, Ensign."

"It does not necessarily follow because a man admires a girl, and has paid a few compliments to her, that—"

"I am listening, Ensign; won't you finish what you've begun?"

"In plain English, then, Mr. Muir—"

"Yes, Ensign, in plain English, what have you got to say about my girl?"

"That—that—"

"You want the marriage deferred, maybe? No; never stamp your foot. You've only to say what you mean, and—"

"Mr. Muir, you are pretending to be labouring under a great delusion."

"Am I? Then it's all your own fault. Why don't you speak out your meaning plain?"

"I have. In so many words, I have told you I am in no position to marry."

"You hear that, Carline?"

The girl did not answer—no, not a word; she only stood looking at her lover, an expression of dumb anguish on her pretty face, a plaintive terror in her dark-gray eyes.

"So you were only making game of her, Ensign, after all? Taking your diversion, and never caring what it might cost the girl. After

that I think we may go. Now she knows from your own lips, I'm not afraid she'll ever meet you again. She might not have taken my word for all this, but she can't be off believing you. He led you to believe, Carline, he meant to make a fine lady of you, didn't he?"

She formed an assent with her lips, but her tongue refused its office.

"Well, well! Your betters have been deceived before now by such as him. I think we'll be going, Ensign; we've heard about enough." And without another word Mr. Muir turned on his heel, and, motioning his daughter to precede him, ascended the bank, and began wending his way back to the house.

He walked a little distance in silence, then looked at Carline, who was dragging herself wearily by his side.

"Let this be a warning to you, girl," he said, and stretched out his hand, which she took and held in silence.

"When you get indoors," he went on, "put what you are likely to need together. I am going

to take you after dinner to Mrs. Sinton for a while, where that young rascal won't find you, and beyond the reach of Bell's tongue. You'd like well to go to Mrs. Sinton, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," she murmured; "I'd like to go to her—any place out of this."

"She's a good sort of a woman," observed Mr. Muir; "and I can trust her with you;" and no further remark passed between them on the subject.

That night Mrs. Sinton was awakened by the sound of a wailing cry,

"O, I wish I hadn't plucked it! What made me pluck it?"

"What are you moaning over, Carline?" asked Mrs. Sinton, who was a widow.

"I was thinking about a leaf I plucked to-day and threw in the water. It has been tossing from place to place all the day long, and it's out in the weather and the dark by itself. I wish I had taken thought, and left it alone."

Mrs. Sinton did not answer in words; she only took the girl close in her arms, and drew

the tired head on her breast, and kissed the fresh young lips, and sighed "O dear, O dear!" at intervals, as she lay awake thinking till long after day had dawned.

CHAPTER XI.

THE confession of failure can never, under any circumstances, be other than disagreeable; but such a confession becomes doubly unpleasant when it has to be made to those of a man's own household.

There were many things Gorman Muir would have preferred to returning home and telling his father that Mr. Baird had seemed more inclined to flout than to favour him. The news that he was in disgrace must, the young fellow fancied, have flown from Kilkenny to Derry; at all events, the fact met him the moment he crossed Mr. Baird's threshold.

"If you are wise you will try to make matters up with your uncle," said that gentleman. "As for an agency, Mr. Trevasson would have helped you to that or anything else in reason."

The cold shoulder is not a palatable dish; and

Gorman had almost too much of it. In every possible form it was served up for his delectation. No matter where he went or what he applied for, a morsel of the abhorred food was thrust under his nose. Those acquainted with his origin had grudged him his prosperity; and now he was down many a foot was raised to give him a sly or open kick. As a matter of course, the Gormans had never looked kindly upon Mr. Trevasson's adoption scheme; and there was rejoicing all through their borders when they heard the gates of Mount Michael were closed upon the son of Hewson Muir.

Gorman had not been accustomed to such diet as was now provided for him, and he made creditable efforts to refuse it. All in vain, however. The story of Mr. Muir's marriage, more than a quarter of a century old though it was, might have been a perfectly fresh tale, so frequently was it repeated, so eagerly was it listened to.

The son of that ill-assorted union had better have stayed away from Derry, where all the facts were as well known as the appearance of the

cathedral clergy. In provincial towns a scandal never dies; and upon the ins and outs of the Muir-Gorman alliance, nine-and-twenty years' gossip had conferred a dramatic and unholy immortality. It was there Gorman heard the whole story in its integrity; there, for the first time, he saw the broad lands and stretching moors of Clonmellin; there he sat in the bailiff's house whence his grandfather had been driven in disgrace; there, by feeing the housekeeper, he was permitted—an entire stranger—to walk through the room where Miss Katty, the gipsy, as she was still called, had danced and laughed, and deceived the "old lady," and gone out for the last time, cursed by her father, in company with a man who was "no fit match for such as her."

There, also, he met with one of his cousins "over for the shooting"—a tall, lanky-looking fellow, with long face, small shrewd blue eyes, and hair as nearly red as hair can be—who directed him on his road, unwitting they were of the smallest kin to one another. An alien and a stranger, he paced the seashore over which, with girlish glee,

his mother had once watched the white-lipped waves chasing each other.

He felt lonely in his very soul. Had there been one to say, "God save you kindly," or "Welcome to the old place," he could have borne it better. It was the sense of utter desolation, the feeling that none knew, none cared what had become of Catherine Gorman's child, which seemed to kill all manliness within him. As he looked out over the Atlantic lying still and peaceful like a giant asleep, he could have wept tears salter than the salt sea's brine, thinking of the mother he had never known, and his own past, which could come back no more. A few months previously what had he not been? what had he not hoped? what had he not expected? and now—now—with an impatient gesture, he dug his heel into the shingle, remembering all that brief time had taken from him. He was an outcast from the home and the rank to which he had been accustomed since childhood. He was too old to take life in his hand and go out to meet fortune. He had been brought up to great expectations, and

behold! in a moment, those expectations resolved themselves into fifty pounds, and a possible thousand to the back of them.

Like his poor young dead mother, to whom such terribly bitter fortune—all of her own choosing—came before she counted one-and-twenty years, he had heard the portals of "home" clang behind him, and listened to the echoes of a curse that still seemed to float around his head.

He remained mooning about Derry and its neighbourhood longer than the hospitality extended to him or the slender state of his purse seemed to warrant, merely because he could not summon up courage to return to Ardilaw.

Though far from happy in the maiden city, he knew he was less miserable there than must prove to be the case under his father's roof. He had been prepared to meet with many things certain to be antagonistic to every taste and habit of his previous life; but he found it well-nigh impossible to think with equanimity of the man who called him son, and who at length urged his return home, saying,

"You're just spending your substance for naught up where you are now. Better come back, and we'll try whether there is nothing you can get to do in Down. Mr. Garnsey will give you a commission that may put a few pounds in your pocket. As for going to Dublin, as you talk of—go if you like, but take Ardilaw in your way. I mean to try and get the most of the corn cut next week. If the weather holds up, the crop needn't be despised. No word from your uncle yet? I am afraid you have nothing in writing about that thousand pounds."

"No," said Gorman, when Mr. Muir repeated this question verbally; "I have nothing in writing; and, moreover, if I had, I would not enforce my claim."

"It is little use putting yourself out about what you might do, as it does not lie in your power to do anything," commented Mr. Muir, with exasperating coolness. "And there's no call to get angry with me because I ask you a simple question. I don't throw it up to you that your luck's out at elbows. That's not exactly

your own fault. All that troubles me now is what you are to turn to."

"I wish to heaven I knew," said his son.

"You know you are more than welcome here; but—"

"I could not remain here idle; it would kill me."

"I see that—and I see, too, you've been brought up with the idea of doing no work which is not pleasure. It's a very good notion of life in its way, but I'm afraid it won't find a man in victuals and pocket money, for all that."

"I am quite willing to work. I'll follow the plough, if need be," said Gorman, with some temper.

"We won't begin ploughing much before November, but you can try your hand then if you like," answered Mr. Muir dryly.

"I will go to Dublin first, and see whether there is not any chance of an agency."

"Best keep your travelling expenses in your pocket," advised his father. "Who have you got that you could go to outside your uncle's friends?

and you know what they'll say to you. The wisest thing for you to do is, lie quiet for a bit, and keep out of sight and hearing of the old man's acquaintances till he begins to be anxious about you. There are things to be done hereabouts, if you'd only do them—and money to be made, granting you were willing to make it."

"If you wish me to turn horse-dealer, of course I ought to raise no objection."

"Man alive! only to hear you. Horse-dealer, indeed! And if you *were* a horse-dealer, come to that, were would be the disgrace? Why, look at old Cleery, out on the road to Comber—you've seen the fine house he has built himself, with the big greenhouse full of flowers, and his daughters able to play and sing and talk French, and they dress as well as the Marchioness, though, of course, there's a something about them by which you can tell they're not just real born ladies—well, he started in life as stable-boy at Purdy's Burn, but he'd a taste for horses and a judgment about them, and has worked himself up and on till he's made himself what you see—"

"A pattern for imitation," said Gorman, with grim distinctness.

"His name is in everything about. His Lordship's agent has always a civil word for him. It's Cleery this and Cleery the other; and 'What do you think of "the favourite"?' or 'Why are they laying such odds against King at Arms?' No, you needn't wrinkle up your brow and let down your mouth. I don't say you would be proud of notice like that, but if you had not been brought up soft you would know it is scarce to be despised."

"I am afraid I could not hope to emulate the extraordinary success Mr. Cleery has achieved," remarked Gorman, his voice sounding hoarse and hard as he spoke.

"You might do something, at any rate," answered Mr. Muir, too wise to take any notice of the bitter ring in his son's tones. "Mr. Garnsey made you a fair offer; and I'm very sure there was nothing in his offer the best gentleman in the land need have drawn a thraw mouth over."

"I shall be glad to accept Mr. Garnsey's offer," said Gorman slowly. "Beggars, you know, must not be choosers."

"If I was young like you, if I had a face such as yours, and a figure such as yours, and ways such as yours, it's not of beggars or beggary I'd be talking," exclaimed Mr. Muir. "I'd be casting about instead to see where there was a young woman possessed of a fine fortune and the best of relations, and, when I found out, ask her to be my wife."

"Ay, indeed?"

"Faith, and indeed; and you wouldn't have far to look. Up at Beechfield there's just the wife for you, if you don't let her slip. An only daughter, too—and never a son!" with which final statement Mr. Muir felt so charmed he had to stop in his discourse and laugh to himself, the while Gorman regarded him with abhorrent astonishment.

"I hate Miss Garnsey," he said, at last, "a degree more than I do Mr. Garnsey. I think him the greatest blackguard I ever spoke to, and

I consider his daughter the least feminine woman a man need desire to meet."

"What ails you at her? You might travel Down through, you might travel Ireland through, before you'd meet with a better-natured, freer-spoken young woman than Miss Lydia Garnsey."

"The Lord be praised for that, at any rate."

"I'd have thought, now, she and you would have hit it off from the first minute you met. She's not to say handsome, I allow; but by the time a man's married three months he finds looks make little odds to him; no, not if a woman was Venus herself—and—"

"Look here," interposed Mr. Gorman Muir, "if we are to agree, let us keep clear of the subject of matrimony altogether."

"Well, well; I see you are hard to drive—"

"I am, and the devil himself couldn't lead me along any road at the end of which I might have to take Miss Garnsey for better or worse. I'll do what her father wants, as it may please you; but I wouldn't marry that girl if she was hung with diamonds."

"I wonder what you want. She's good to the poor, and she's fit to consort with the rich. It does not signify a farthing to her, whether there's fever or smallpox in any house: in she goes with her little can of soup, or pot of jelly, or custard pudding, or—"

"What she does or leaves undone is nothing to me."

"Faith, you are hard-mouthed, Gorman. I wonder what's the sort of bit you would answer to. It is quite unreasonable the way you talk, about a girl, too, who can go across country like a bird. Where would you find her like in the saddle?"

"Nowhere, I hope," retorted Gorman. "It's no use, I tell you, talking about Miss Garnsey to me. If ever I start a wife—which is most unlikely—I'll look out for a woman who can talk about something else than horses and dogs—a quiet girl, who would be ashamed to joke with grooms and helpers and vets., as Miss Garnsey does."

"Whoever you marry, man, steer clear of the

quiet ones. Why, my third wife, Carline's mother, was as quiet-looking and soft-spoken a creature as ever made a man's life a terror to him. Well I mind the first hour I ever set eyes on her. It was very early of a summer's morning, in the first part of June. The dew was not off the grass, and the hawthorn was in full flower; the air was laden with it. I was living at Kilmoon then, and had to be in Donaghadee by seven, and so started off betimes. There were not many stirring on the road, and I was driving steady, for I knew the mare would have a hard time of it before our day's work was done; when, just as I was passing Summerfield, I saw a female sitting on the bank in a bare place of the hedge."

Mr. Muir paused. For his son's edification, he had raised a ghost from out the past, and he did not seem to like its aspect.

"And she was—"

"Carline's mother. Some day, maybe, I'll tell you the whole story, though I have never cared to talk much about the three years I passed with her. What I started to say was, give the

woman that speaks low and slow—scarce raising her voice above a quiet whisper—the widest berth you can manage. The Atlantic wouldn't be too much space to keep between you. Miss Garnsey mightn't be just to your mind; but, at any rate, you see in the first ten minutes all the harm there's in her. As for the good, that story couldn't be told out in a day. There's not an old wife for miles round but could find something to say to her credit."

"When is Carline coming home?" asked Mr. Gorman Muir, who put the question, not because he felt anxious for his sister's return, but simply for the reason that he desired to end the Miss Garnsey controversy.

"I'm not just sure," answered the farmer. "If it suits Mrs. Sinton to keep her, I'd like well for her to stop where she is till all is settled for the wedding."

"What wedding?"

"Why, hers. She has been promised for the last two years to young Robert Cragland. He has been away in Dumfriesshire, learning more

about sheep and suchlike than he could do here; and his father and me weren't able to agree exactly about the money I am to pay down with Carline. I have made up my mind, though, now to stretch a point and give what he wants—for I couldn't and wouldn't be troubled looking after her here. A husband is the fittest person to see a woman keeps straight."

"She is certainly very pretty," remarked Gorman, thinking he was expected to say something.

"She's not bad looking," agreed Mr. Muir; "and though she does not strain after her mother in her ways, yet I shall never feel quite easy about her now. There's always somebody to put notions in a foolish girl's head; and the lesson she got over the Ensign may not last her as long as it should."

"What did the Ensign do?"

"Why, he got making love to her; and they began writing to one another on the sly, and making appointments to meet, unknown, as they thought, to anybody. A hint was given me, so I came back one day, and made a third in the party.

I asked him a few plain questions that he could not exactly answer, and I compelled the girl to stop and hear him confess what a hound he was. That's why I sent her away. As for the Ensign, I thought it best to clench that nail; so I made it my business to see his Colonel, and get my gentleman leave for a while."

"Why did you not send for me?" exclaimed Gorman. "I'd have taught him a lesson he wouldn't have forgotten in a hurry. It's not too late to horsewhip him now."

"Just you sit quiet. There's no need to distress yourself. If I'd thought a flogging was the best thing, I could have laid into him myself, but I wanted no stir made over the matter. Old Cragland was never to say too sweet about the match, and Carline's not likely to fall in with so good a chance again. Upon the whole, I think I'll bring her home soon. If she stops away too long people might begin to talk, and I don't think anybody will come skulking round the place for a while, at any rate."

"He'd better not," said Gorman, "if he has

any respect for his bones. Talk or no talk, I'd make him repent the day he tried to fool Carline."

"Don't put yourself out. The Ensign won't show his face again in a hurry at Ardilaw, nor his Colonel neither. *He* rode down to tell me he had given Mrs. Ludham a hint of what was going on, and arranged the young man should not come back while the regiment stopped at Belfast. We put up his horse, and he looked over the place, and made as though he had a notion of buying one of the colts; and he went round the garden, and seemed pleased to see damsons again, and I asked him if he could eat a mouthful of cheese and some good oat-cake, and he said yes, and had that and a jugful of milk, and sat a long time talking most agreeably. I declare he took me in, if ever a man did. I had not a notion of what he was waiting for till he said, 'I hope Miss Carline is quite well.' I answered that she was; and then I just laughed in his face, and told him she wasn't at home, and that if she was he shouldn't see her.

'I didn't get rid of the Ensign to be bothered with the Colonel,' I remarked. 'I couldn't write

to *your* mother if you've got one; and who would I apply to to give *you* leave of absence?'

"You never saw a man so taken aback in your life. He tried to make light of my notion, but it was the right one. He didn't stop long after that, and he never said another word about the colt; and I haven't heard a syllable from him from that day to this."

With a muttered oath, Gorman Muir sprang from his chair, plunged his hands fiercely in his pockets, and commenced walking up and down the room.

"Man alive!" exclaimed his father, who had only the vaguest idea as to what was the matter, "you can put on an awful look. Don't bend your brows and set your mouth like that. The Evil One himself could scarce have a worse cast of countenance than you at this minute."

"The Evil One himself could scarce feel worse than I do at this minute," retorted Gorman, with a sudden gust of fury Mr. Muir deemed it best "to let blow by" ere adventuring upon any other topic of conversation.

CHAPTER XII.

CARRYING a bouquet of hot-house flowers in one hand, and a fancy basket filled with autumn fruit in the other, Mrs. Boyle entered the only sitting-room Clear Stream Cottage boasted, where Berna sat sewing diligently. At sight of her mother the girl rose, and placing both bouquet and basket on the table, would have assisted to remove shawl and bonnet, but that Mrs. Boyle waved her impatiently back.

"Can't you let me alone?" she inquired. "Don't you see I've hardly a leg left to stand on? I must rest myself before I take off my things. It *is* a drag from that railway station—if ever there was an out-of-the-way place, it's this. Richard Vince needn't have been afraid of meeting me in Belfast often when it's a day's journey to the train from here before a body has walked a step in the town. I'm just fit to drop off my feet,

having to carry such a burden all along that dusty road, and hold my dress up into the bargain."

"I am so sorry. If I had only known which train you were likely to come by I would have met you, mamma," said Berna.

"Yes; and it was so likely a thing I'd know the train I could come by," answered Mrs. Boyle, with a pettish impatience by which her daughter knew too well things had not been going quite to her mind. "If you'd been like any other girl, I needn't have gone by myself, or travelled back by myself; but it's well seen who you take after. Not me, I'm very sure. It's no wonder the Pirns think little of me when my own child won't visit my friends."

"They have given you some beautiful flowers," remarked Berna, bending over the bunch, and touching the buds tenderly.

"That's only to show that they have got such things, and to break my heart thinking of what good fortune falls to other people, and nothing but ill-luck to me! Though they have their carriages and their horses, they couldn't offer to

drive me home; and not a word about my stopping to dinner and stay over the night, as I made up my mind to do, if for nothing but to oblige them. It's a hard world, Berna; and, maybe, you're just as wise to keep out of it. Mr. Pirn did let drop a word hoping you would go to a dance there; but I threw cold water on the notion. I said, if you didn't go to my own cousin's at Craigvallen, it wasn't over and above likely you'd go to *them*. I know that cut Mrs. Pirn, for she'd give anything if she could only get asked to Richard's."

Berna made no comment; she merely moved back to her seat, and would have resumed her work if Mrs. Boyle had not interposed:

"What are you sewing now? Can't you leave off for even a minute, when you know how it tries me to see you stitch, stitch, stitching, as if you had to earn your bread by your needle? I can't talk a bit while you keep on with that seam, and my heart just bursting with vexation. They've set up a butler and footman, if you please; and everything is as genteel and precise as if they

were lords and ladies. It's enough to make anybody laugh! Many's the time I've seen Mrs. Pirn's old aunt hanging out the clothes—and a beautiful colour she kept them; I'll say that for her. Poor old girl! it would put the surprise on her if she could come back and see the house, fit for any nobleman, her niece has got into now."

"Had I not better put those flowers into water?" suggested Berna.

"The—flowers—can—wait," said Mrs. Boyle, with a drawling intonation peculiarly aggravating; "considering the time they have been on the road here, and the heat of my hand, a few minutes more can't hurt them; and, indeed, I was in two minds to throw the things away as I came along, I felt so angry when I thought of the distant way the Pirns treated me. Mrs. Pirn told me the best story, though, I've heard this many a day, and all about Mrs. Vince. Ah! it's no wonder she tries to be civil to me, considering she owes everything she has in the world to my own cousin. It's a poor way she'd have been in this day if it hadn't been for Richard Vince."

"I think Mr. Vince was very fortunate to meet with so nice a wife."

"I'm not so sure of that; by what I understand, he might have had the pick of the North of Ireland. It's wonderfully gratifying to hear how much he is respected, and the heaps of money he has got, and the grand people he knows; and you may be sure I didn't open my mouth and tell Mrs. Pirn he wouldn't look to the side of the street I was on if he could help it. I made her think they were fairly crazy to get us to Craigvallen, and that it was only our pride wouldn't let us go there constantly."

For the second time Berna took up her work, but, remembering her mother's objection, laid it down again.

"What was I wanting to tell you? What was I saying? You've put it clean out of my head. What in the world could it be?"

"Something about Mrs. Vince."

"To be sure; how could I forget? You would never guess the way she got to be mistress of Craigvallen."

"No; I cannot guess," said Berna.

"Well, it's just a proof of the things people will do for money—and people that have held their heads high enough too. Why, in the county Antrim there wasn't a family thought more of themselves than the Carpenters of Cherryfield. There were not wanting those that said the first of the name had risen from low enough; but every family must have a beginning, as it mostly has an end, and the Carpenters were grand people when I first remember them, I can tell you that."

"One has only to hear Mrs. Vince speak to be sure of that," agreed Berna.

"Sure of it? Yes; you might be sure of it if you'd never set eyes on Mrs. Vince. I'm not in the habit of telling you anything but what's sacred truth; and, after living all my life in the best of society, I wouldn't need an ignorant slip of a girl like you to instruct me in speaking."

"I never thought of doing anything of the kind," said the "ignorant slip," appalled.

"See you don't, then. I never was one that

had much liking for being bidden, and I am not going to begin now. Well, as I was remarking, in all our part of the country the Carpenters were allowed to be the grandest people out. There was nothing they stood still for—carriages and dress, and governesses and masters, and servants, and I couldn't tell you what all. Many's the time when I was a young child, about three years old, I have seen Miss Marcella—that's Mrs. Vince, you know—galloping past my father's house on her pony with her sisters—they were older than her, you understand. She used to wear a blue habit, and a cap like a boy's; and you'd have heard them all laughing as they went tearing across the commons like mad things. I wonder if Richard ever thinks now of how they used to splash him as they rode by. I have heard him swear against them awful, though you would think, to look at him now, a bad word had never passed his lips."

"And how did they lose their money?" asked Berna, who, while conversing with her mother, was always searching about for six inches of safe

ground to stand upon, and always somehow slipping into water.

"How did they lose it? I declare you're enough to drive anybody mad. If I've told you once I've told you a hundred times the way Theophilus Carpenter squandered his substance. He bet on races; he would go to London and lose as much over a game of cards in one night as would have kept a moderate family for a year. He had his hunters and his hacks, and the house full of extravagant company, and wine such as my father often said the King needn't have been ashamed to set before his Lords, temporal and spiritual; and if ever anybody ought to have known about spirits it was my father—he rarely went to bed a night of his life sober."

Mrs. Boyle paused a moment in ecstatic contemplation of her parent's virtues ere she resumed:

"The extravagance of that house, he used to say, might have made a bald man's hair stand on end. And so things went on and on and on, till at last there came a crash. It was one night

when they were playing cards, a private note came to Mr. Carpenter, and he asked some gentleman to take his hand for him while he sent an answer. Well, my dear, nobody in that room ever set eyes on him again. What does he do but start away without even a change of linen, and get himself clean off to France. He never came back. In a minute the whole of the glory of Cherryfield was snuffed out, like the wick of a candle. The bailiffs went into the house, and the family left it. For a while Mrs. Carpenter and her daughters lived among their friends, but they soon tired them out. One girl was glad enough to marry a poor curate she had turned up her nose at when she could look at nothing lower than marquises and baronets; another was taken out to India by some great lady they had influence with; a third died. I don't know what was done for the sons, but they were drafted off abroad; and so, to cut a long story short, at last they all dwindled down to this Marcella, who stopped with her mother on a trifle of money that was scraped some way together out of the estate."

"Well, mamma?" inquired Berna, really interested in a story which possessed some family features in common with her own.

"*Well!*—what do you mean by *well?* I never heard anybody like you. I daresay Marcella thought it ill enough when the old lady died, and she was left with little more than the clothes she stood up in."

"It was very hard," murmured Berna.

"I make no doubt she thought so; but it wasn't any harder for her than it has been since for other people. Remembering her own troubles, anybody might have concluded she'd have had some feeling for mine. It seems she tried and tried to get something to do. Mrs. Pirn did say she heard she went as a nursery governess, but she couldn't be just sure; and she might have gone out as nurse next if she had not bethought her of my cousin Richard. One fine morning she knocks at his door and asks to see him. You may be sure she had put on her best manners as well as her best gown. He was at his breakfast, and, not to seem high, he told the servant to

show her in; and as he couldn't just forget, low as she had come down, that he was talking to Miss Carpenter, once upon a time of Cherryfield, he made her take a chair, and poured her out some tea, and made as much of her as though she was Queen of Great Britain and Ireland. At last the mischief was revealed. She wanted a situation as housekeeper: could he tell her of any one needing such a thing, and would he recommend her? He thought a while, and said, 'Yes, if she wished, he would endeavour to forward her views; but,' he went on, 'I think you might do better.'

'In what way?' she asked, as if she hadn't a notion of his meaning.

'Why, come and keep house for me,' he made answer. And then in so many words he said, would she be his wife? And the upshot of the matter was that, three months after, they were married, and all the country-side was at the wedding; and who so grand and affable as Mrs. Richard Vince, and who so proud as the foolish man who had let himself be caught so neatly?"

"I do not believe the story, mamma," declared Berna indignantly. "Mrs. Pirn must be mistaken."

"*I* believe it, then; and that's enough. Things are coming to something, I'm sure, when children fly in the face of their parents, and settle what's to be said and what's to be told. You wait till Mrs. Vince comes out here next, and I'll give her a sly hint I know all about how she got my cousin. I know the way I'll do it."

"You never shall have the chance of doing it," thought Berna; but she made no comment. She only took up her work, this time with the firm intention of getting on with that seam, which, if left to Mrs. Boyle's idle fingers, would never have been finished.

CHAPTER XIII.

"I THINK," said Mrs. Boyle, after a silence broken only by the sound of Berna's busy needle and her own sighs, "I might take a cup of tea now, if it was hot and not too much milk in it."

Berna laid aside her work. "I will tell Ruth," she eagerly proposed. "She is baking soda-bread. Shall I butter you some?"

"If you do, mind you bring me in no more than the breadth of my finger. I never can eat; I don't know what is to become of me, as I was telling Mrs. Pirn no later back than one o'clock."

"You must try," answered her daughter; and she left the sitting-room and passed into the kitchen, where Ruth was washing the flour off her hands while the soda-bread was rising to a satisfactory thickness as it baked upon the girdle suspended from a crook over the fire.

"I want to make mamma some tea, Ruth; and have we got a new-laid egg?"

"The eggs could not be fresher, Miss Berna; and the mistress can't be off liking the cake. I'll set the tray in a minute."

"You need not take in a cup for me, nurse; I do not want any tea;" and Berna leaned her head against the chimney-piece and looked into the glowing depths of a clear turf fire.

Ruth paused in her occupation to survey the girl. She had nursed her; she loved her. She knew—who that lived in the same house could help knowing?—the daily, hourly fret Mrs. Boyle was to her. The old servant possessed that subtle sympathy and quick tact which is the birthright of the Irish, and, without asking a question as to what had gone wrong, remarked,

"If your head is bad, Miss Berna, why don't you go for a turn in the meadow, instead of standing in this hot kitchen? I'll take in the mistress's tea, and tell her where you are."

"Thank you, Ruth; I will go into the meadow. I need not put on a bonnet. I shall not meet any one out there."

The meadow thus referred to—which belonged to Mr. Muir, being a portion of Kilmoon Farm —lay at the rear of Clear Stream Cottage, and could be entered from the garden of that house through a low rustic gate made of green, unbarked fir.

Just as she was, without shawl or bonnet, in her sad, black dress, adorned by nothing save youth and beauty, Berna passed in the calm evening light on to the grass, which had again been cropped almost as close by the cattle as a couple of months previously by the mowers. There was a delicious crispness in the air; soft and peaceful the tender rural landscape lay spread before her. What an exquisite world it was! How fair the heights of Gilnakirk in the near distance looked, with the corn-stooks clustered thick upon them! It was a rich, happy country that met her gaze—blessed by God, well cultivated by man. For such as Berna, the face of Nature wears a smile everywhere; and as she walked the girl's heart grew lighter, and hope whispered life was not yet over, and that while life remains

something of happiness may still be in store or the saddest soul that ever carried its burden of sorrow in silent anguish.

For a long time she paced slowly up and down the field. She knew exactly what was passing indoors. Mrs. Boyle sat taking her tea, and at the same time discoursing to Ruth concerning the splendour of Mr. Pirn's house, mingling her descriptions with such questions and exclamations as—"Will you ever forget her old aunt?" and "I wonder what my father would say if he knew the Pirns had grown too big to care to keep company with Mrs. Boyle, of Boyle Court?"

She would not be missed, and even if she were, Ruth, dear old Ruth, the only person able to manage her mother, could make things straight for her.

For the time she felt free to let her mind wander over the past and the future—over the beautiful mournful past, and the future still shrouded amid the vague romantic mists in which for the young, Time cunningly enfolds coming events. What did she see written on

the clouds, dyed with the gorgeous tints left behind by the departed sun? Heaven only knows, save that it was some tender poem—some sweet unreality which caused her lips to part, and her eyes to grow larger, and their depths to deepen, and brought her lingering footsteps to a standstill, because she would not disturb the illusion with movement.

The glorious tints faded gently out of the sky. Twilight stole softly on, the distant landscape stole imperceptibly out of sight, a slight wind stirred the trees in the hedgerow, yet Berna stood motionless, till suddenly, with a little cry of affrighted surprise, she sprang backward.

A great black horse, which in the dark looked higher and bigger than was actually the case, with a man on its back, who seemed scarcely less startled than herself, had shied suddenly at sight of the girl, and, though a hand of iron was on the bridle, went on plunging violently. She had not heard the sound of coming hoofs, and at that hour, in that lonely place, in that mysterious light, horse and rider loomed on her through

the semi-darkness with the effect of an apparition.

"I have frightened you," said the man, at last succeeding in quieting his horse, coming close up to where she stood.

"Not much," answered the girl, though she felt as if her heart were in her mouth.

"I am very sorry, indeed," he proceeded, trying to get a nearer glimpse of this extraordinary young person who, bare-headed and all alone, was wandering through the quiet fields at such an hour. "I did not expect to meet any one here."

"Nor I," she murmured apologetically.

"It is late for you to be out. May I not see you safe home?" and he drew his feet out of the stirrups as if with the intention of dismounting.

"O, no, no, thank you!" exclaimed Berna. "I have only a few steps to go. Good-evening!"

He did not answer. He only took off his hat, thrust his feet again into the stirrups, watched her till she passed out of his sight, and then, wheeling his horse round, rode back into the lane

whence he had come, and started at a sharp trot for Ardilaw.

As Berna reëntered the cottage she heard her mother's voice still in full progress. Ruth stood just within the parlour door, the tea-things had not been removed, Mrs. Boyle's bonnet and cloak lay on a chair, as she had thrown them off, and Mrs. Boyle herself was giving nurse a vivid description of Richard Vince's interview with the lady he now called wife.

At sight of Berna the widow's words froze on her tongue. The "says hes" and "says shes" of the familar long ago—when Ruth used to come in and help with the Vince sewing, and Ulick Boyle and Boyle Court were still perfectly unknown quantities—never flowed quite glibly off Mrs. Boyle's lips when her daughter was of the company.

But the widow was seldom what she called "taken at a short," and, stopped in the midst of her own exciting narration, it did not take her a moment to change the front of battle, and, attacking Berna, carry war into the enemy's country.

"Well, and perhaps you will tell us where you have been," she began, "stopping out for hours, and coming home in the clouds of darkness, looking as if you were bewitched. Just see there, Ruth, wouldn't anybody think she'd seen a ghost? What do you mean by those white cheeks and great eyes—enough to frighten anybody?"

"I have a headache, mamma."

"And haven't I the headache often enough, and the heartache too, for that matter? and yet you never hear me complain. Here have I been forcing myself to eat—eating and drinking when I thought every mouthful would choke me—so that I mightn't be laid up and put to the expense of a doctor—though goodness only knows where we'd get a doctor, in this back-of-the-world place; while you, for all you've a hearty appetite, won't take your meals regular, but just pick a bit at odd times, when you think you will."

"Indeed, indeed—" Berna was beginning, when Ruth interposed,

"You'll have a glass of milk and a piece of hot cake, won't you, Miss Berna? And there's a

bright fire in the kitchen; I was out looking at it a minute ago. And if I were you, I would warm myself and get to bed. There's nothing for a headache like sleep."

"Ah! she'll never leave off her languid ways while you're living, Ruth," said Mrs. Boyle. "You encourage her in her laziness. Why, when I was your age," she added, addressing her daughter, "I'd have thought shame to go to bed for a headache. I used to dance my headaches off. If we could get nothing but girls to make up a set, why, we took them for partners; and we'd sing the music in turns; and such screaming and laughing and diversion as we had! Well I mind my father, when he was lying ill up-stairs, rapping on the floor with a stick to know if Bedlam had broken loose. Ah! those were days—when I think of them I'm sure I wonder, as I was saying to Mrs. Pirn only to-day, how I ever came to marry, to have all the spirit crushed out of me, and to rear a daughter more like a mute at a funeral than anything else."

"Don't heed the mistress, Miss Berna dear,"

entreated her nurse; "your laughing days are all to come."

"Indeed, and I hope I may live to see them," said Mrs. Boyle. "It would be wonderful to hear Berna laughing and making merry like any other girl."

"She'll be merry enough yet," answered Ruth. "Come, Miss Berna dear, and have a bit of hot soda-bread, I've kept it warm beside the fire, and go to your bed. The mistress is tired, too, though she has such a spirit she won't own to it; and the sooner she lies down and rests herself the better."

Though Ruth's advice was as good as advice could be, Miss Boyle merely followed it because she wished to avoid discussion, and longed to be alone. The glamour of that sky, brilliant with the trail of glory left behind by the departed sun, had not quite left her. The peace and beauty of the quiet scene, which had filled her soul with rapture, still lingered there in memory; the dream she had dreamed while gazing with wide-open eyes on the tender softness of the evening light was not for many days to seem wholly an

illusion; while the appearance of that horse and rider in the mystical twilight, so soon to merge into night, imported just the touch of romance into the story so necessary to a nature like Berna's, out of which her mother had nipped every green shoot, every bud of promise, so soon as it ventured to show even the semblance of a leaf.

Poetry and imagination, both starved in actual life, struck deeper and stronger roots for the reason they could only seek for nourishment in the girl's own heart. She had her friends, though Mrs. Boyle knew none of them; from out the pages of the past they came and comforted her. Knights and ladies, gentle maidens, noble heroines, loyal men, human beings sorely tempted, hard beset; people who suffered and triumphed, who rejoiced, and who, when the worst came to the worst, knew how to die.

Poor in this world's goods—a mere cipher in the estimation of her fellows—God had given her a kingdom better than houses, or gold, or land;

boundary it knew none, save the limits of right and honour; in it women were all fair and virtuous, and men great and noble and chivalrous; flowers never faded there, sorrow never entered. It was in the mysterious land through which poets wander at will and romancers dwell; where wrong is set right, and truth triumphs, and beauty is cherished, and youth tenderly cared for, that Berna Boyle so often sought refuge when her mother wounded her pride, and lashed her temper, and trampled everything which seemed to the girl worth having, level with the dust.

She did not say a word to any one concerning the apparition she had seen in Mr. Muir's meadow. Close to herself she kept the memory of that voice, soft with the tones of the melting south. She could not bear the story to become a topic of common conversation, to hear wonder expressed on the subject, and a thousand conjectures hazarded as to who the stranger might be.

From a gauger to an Earl—she knew her mother was capable of running the gamut on such

a theme; and the stronger her own curiosity grew the more determinedly she resolved to refrain from endeavouring to gratify it.

And certainly as the days of that week went by she had ample cause for curiosity.

Three, sometimes five, times between breakfast and tea she saw that horse and rider pass along the lane; and the rider never once passed without looking wistfully over the hedge in search of something beside the autumn flowers and the babbling stream that still went singing the same song—only louder—it had with such laughing delight flowed merrily to in the golden summer time.

He was looking for *her*. Berna knew that as well as though she had possessed the experience of half-a-dozen London seasons. It was a knowledge which kept her out of the garden, and caused her to refrain from those long walks in which, when her mother was too tired to go out, she had been in the habit of indulging, but it did not prevent her from stealing unobserved glances at the handsome, audacious stranger, or marvelling

who he could be, and with whom he was staying in the neighbourhood.

At last her resolve gave way, and on the Saturday evening following their meeting, while Mrs. Boyle was indulging in one of those naps she "dropped off" into "merely to save lighting a candle," Berna looking into the peat fire, over which hung the eternal girdle with a batch of potato cake "soaking," as Ruth expressed the process of gradual baking necessary to insure the bread being perfectly "done," asked,

"Have you seen a strange gentleman, riding a black horse, nurse, pass here several times lately?"

Nurse paused in her operations for a moment before she answered,

"I can't say that I have, Miss Berna. What like was he?"

"Very dark, good-looking; handsome, indeed. He wears no whiskers, only a moustache, has brown eyes, and rides *splendidly*."

"O!" said Ruth grimly. "Has the horse no hair of white about it except a small star on

its forehead, and has it got a headband worked with beads instead of leather?"

"Yes, that is the horse; do you know who the gentleman is?"

"He is not a gentleman—he is no one for you to be taking notice of or thinking about."

"I have not been taking notice of him," replied the girl, indignantly refuting the first accusation, but maintaining a wise silence with regard to the second. "Still, I certainly should like to know where he comes from."

"He does not come from very far," was the answer; "and it's like his impudence staring over this place as I've seen him do."

"Why, who in the world is he, nurse?"

"He's just Mr. Muir's son—who else would he be?—and a worse man than his father, so the story goes. They say he was sent home in disgrace by the uncle that reared him. That's neither here nor there, though. Whatever he is, and whatever he has done, you must not be troubling your head about him. There's not a Boyle belonging to you but would turn in their

graves if they thought you could take up with such as him. If he comes prowling about here much longer, please or displease, I'll give him a piece of my mind he won't like."

"Not on my account, nurse," said Berna, with an uplifting of her head nurse had been well acquainted with since she was a mere child; "I would not have my name brought into such a matter for the world."

"That's right, dear. It's not right for the like of you to waste a thought on the like of him."

"I was only curious, nurse; and I am curious no longer."

Nevertheless, Berna sighed as she walked out into the darkness and stood for a minute beside the stream.

After all, it is hard to have an illusion shattered; and it seemed a great humiliation to Ulick Boyle's daughter to see her dream knight vanish away and take the shape of Mr. Muir's son.

CHAPTER XIV.

All told, the congregation in Dundonald Church, even on those gala days and high festivals when the parish put its best foot foremost to do honour to Easter and Christmas, or to welcome the few notable divines who on rare occasions lost their way thither, never amounted to more than fifty souls. From that number it dwindled, according to the state of the weather and the physical and religious condition of the public, down to, say, half-a-dozen. There were always the Rector, a good easy-going old clergyman, whom it certainly could not, as Miss Muir truly said, do anybody any harm to go and listen to; the clerk, who struck the note with a pitch-key always too high, who always sang wrong, and who thought he knew a great deal more than Mr. Crommles; the sexton, who stoked a huge stove set in the middle

of the church, who inducted the parishioners into their pews, tolled the bell at intervals in the porch, where he exchanged cordial greetings with his friends, and who was sure he knew more than Mr. Crommles and the clerk put together; the Rector's churchwarden, who wanted to see fair play about the few halfpence collected every Sunday, which halfpence were divided, after service, between two old women representing the poor of the parish; and a certain magistrate, who always attended divine worship, "hail or shine." The church, as has been previously mentioned, was "set on a hill." It could not be considered old in 1850, having replaced one that had been burned down a few years previously, which fact was not certainly to be regarded as a miracle; the only miracle seemed that it failed to burn every Sunday during the winter months. The pews around the stove were usually as scorchingly hot as pews can ever be without flaring into flame. It was a deliciously warm church. Even Dissenters, driven to the top of the hill either by choice or necessity, felt there was a good deal of comfort about THE

ESTABLISHMENT, as they called that form of worship watched over by Victoria by the Grace of God; and were certainly of opinion, as they walked demurely home, that if they got no rousing doctrine, they had received the benefit of a capital fire. There was a tower to the church, and in the graveyard a monument which looked higher than the tower, whether it was or not. With bated breath the inhabitants used to tell the story of that monument, and how it cost a matter of over three hundred pounds!

Dear, simple, primitive village: could there ever on earth have been a more delightful place for one, world-tired and weary, to pause for a moment and take breath?

On the ascent of the funny little hill, not so high as the church, as befitted its degree, or so low as the village, likewise the correct position, stood the Meeting-House, approved of by the inhabitants, and supported by that Act passed by William of Orange, as a matter of gratitude to the Presbyterians of the Black North. It was that pious individual's *Regium Donum* which kept

the minister to a certain degree independent of his hard-mouthed congregation, and enabled him to maintain a decent roof over his head. Not that there was any lack of a congregation there. The Meeting-House swept in the bone and sinew of the country-side. When nineteen-twentieths of a population are Presbyterians and the odd twentieth consists of Dissenters of other denominations—Roman Catholics and outside sinners who loaf about and go nowhere—it is clear that the "Church minister" cannot expect a large audience.

Mr. Crommles had no expectations of the sort. If he had he would have been disappointed. As he was a person who loved his ease, perhaps the last thing he desired was an overflowing congregation, involving visiting. He was what the Dissenters called a "moderate sort of man," holding no strong opinions except on the vexed subject of tithes, fond of digging his own glebe-land, and as ready to exchange cordial good-mornings with the rankest Dissenter as the staunchest upholder of Church and State—with

the wife of a labourer as "The Marchioness" when the blessing and privilege of greeting that lady came in his way.

Such as the Church was, and such as the Rector was, however, Berna Boyle loved both. Though Kilmoon Farm contributed its modest quota to the clergyman's income, the lapse of long years had wiped the Kilmoon pew off the wardens' books; and it was only "out of compliment," so Mrs. Boyle declared, a fitting position was allotted to her close to the grandees of the neighbourhood.

"We are next but one to the square pews," she said. "I suppose the old man wasn't able to do any better for us!"

Whatever else she left undone, the widow attended church regularly. In her heart she felt she should have preferred going to Meeting, on account of the larger congregation and also because of the less stiffness and greater friendliness which there obtained; but in this imperfect world people cannot combine every advantage, and Mrs. Boyle, wishing to be "genteel," was

forced to forego the delights attaching to Dissent.

The widow believed that in her deep mourning, with her small, sharp, washed-out face, she was the observed of all observers; and when she clasped her prayer-book, where the metrical version of the Psalms held its honoured place, she felt as a celebrated singer may do when closing her music and bowing grateful acknowledgments to an appreciative audience. As a rule, there was not much variety to be met with in the little church. Strangers came that way seldom, and when they did chance to come, rarely stopped long in the neighbourhood; so it was certainly with no expectation of novelty or of "seeing any living creature worth seeing" that Mrs. Boyle carefully pinned her crape bows on the Sunday morning following her visit to Mrs. Pirn.

"I am sick and tired of the place," she said to her daughter as they walked through the village in a silence only broken by the clang-clang of the church bell. "As Matilda Sheill says, it's not the sort of thing I ever expected to have to come

down to. If I wasn't the most cheerful and contented woman in the world I'd have drowned myself long ago."

"We might be much worse off," ventured Berna.

"I don't very well see how; not unless we were on the parish, and had to break stones on the road. And such a church! Never even a new bonnet to be seen in it. That's Mr. Garnsey just turning up the Church Road. I wonder how it is the daughter's not with him to-day. She seldom misses showing herself, though, goodness knows, she's not much of a show. Come on, Berna, we'll be late. Ah! just what I thought, there's the last tinkle of the bell."

They were not very late, however. Mr. Crommles was only walking across to the reading-desk as mother and daughter entered the church, and they were devoutly kneeling when he began "When the wicked man"—a statement the worthy clergyman always unconsciously emphasised by looking hard at Mr. Garnsey, who, if popular rumour could be re-

lied on as correct, had still very little chance of "saving his soul alive."

It was while the Rector was reading the Exhortation that a young man entered the church and stood waiting, with a not ungraceful shyness, in expectation of being shown to a seat. There were but two aisles in the church, and all the pews were situated between them. The young man, either by choice or design, elected to wait in that isle farthest from where Mrs. Boyle was standing, the admired of all admirers. Just for a moment the sexton failed to see the new-comer, then he hurried towards him, and was about placing this unexpected worshipper quite at the rear of the building, when suddenly Mr. Garnsey's pew-door flew open, and that gentleman made a sign for the fresh arrival to come up higher.

It might all be strictly Biblical; the sexton had nothing to say against that when discussing matters afterwards, but he felt greatly exercised in his mind nevertheless.

"Lyle Garnsey," he remarked in The Stag,

for those to hear who pleased, "has no doubt a right to ask any man he likes to sit down with him at his own table, but I deny he has any right to throw our church all into confusion by interfering with my province, and beckoning the son of Hewson Muir to sit among the first in the county. Young Gorman had no call to come to church, anyway. Why couldn't he have stopped below and listened to what was going on in the Meeting? Set him up, indeed, putting his silver shilling in the box like any gentleman."

Which was all hard on Mr. Gorman Muir, who certainly had not put himself forward, and who looked much more like a gentleman than even Lyle Garnsey himself. All through the service he listened with apparently devout attention to every word which fell from Mr. Crommles' lips. He had a rich mellow voice, and joined in the music, greatly to the disgust of the clerk, who tried to drown his tones. Without thought of ostentation, he dropped his "silver shilling" into the poor-box, and when the sermon began, crossed his arms and turned a rapt gaze upon the Rector,

who preached a sermon which had done loyal duty on many a previous occasion.

No man could outwardly have behaved better than Mr. Muir junior, and it was not his fault if the attention of all in the church was diverted by his presence from the original purpose which had brought them out.

As for Berna, she kept her eyes fixed on her prayer-book, on Mr. Crommles, on the clerk, on the trees clad in their glorious autumn foliage which she could see through the window close at hand, on anything rather than the man in Mr. Garnsey's pew, who had frightened her much less when he loomed through the darkness of that remembered night than now, when, in the face of day, he came to the last place she ever expected to see him.

As she and her mother walked homeward she did not say one word. Almost in an agony she waited to hear what comment would be made upon his appearance in church.

They were opposite the police barrack before Mrs. Boyle spoke; then, turning to Berna

with a pleased and conscious simper, she asked,

"You don't see any spot or anything on my face, dear, do you?"

"No," answered the girl, "not any."

"And is my bonnet on right?"

"Quite right."

"*Then what that strange gentleman found to stare at is a mystery to me!*"

CHAPTER XV.

ALL the way to Clear Stream Cottage—and the way was long—Mrs. Boyle's discourse ran a turbulent and excited stream on the stranger who had appeared in church. Her talk consisted of a series of ejaculations and questions. "It was many a long day" since she had seen so handsome a man—his eyes seemed to "pierce her through." "Did you ever behold their equal?" she asked her daughter.

"I did not look at him, mamma," answered Berna.

"Well, I'm not finding any fault with you for that," said Mrs. Boyle. "It's as well even for so young a girl as you are to keep her eyes to herself. Still, it's a pity you did not just take a glance. I wonder who he can be? Some grandee, I shouldn't be a bit surprised! I never did see anything like the way that Mr. Garnsey

puts himself forward—throwing wide the door just as if the whole church belonged to him."

"His pew does, I suppose," ventured the girl.

"I don't think it. Beechfield can't be in the parish; and it's a burning shame he should have a square seat, and better people than he ever came of forced to put up with the box we are shut into. Ah, one of these days I'll have a few words to say to Mr. Garnsey he won't like; and I'll not forget to mention that square pew when I am about it!"

"Why, how has Mr. Garnsey offended you, mamma?" asked Berna.

"By his ungentlemanliness, if you must know. He nearly rode over me a while ago, and when I spoke to him about it he asked me why I did not keep out of the road; as if the road wasn't as much mine as his."

Berna did not answer; she must indeed have been dense had she failed ere that moment to understand most of her mother's little tricks.

"I never saw more shapely hands on a man,"

said Mrs. Boyle, recurring to the hero question. "Mr. Garnsey's looked coarse beside them. I'll warrant those hands have never done any hard work; and O, the beautiful diamond ring he wore on his little finger, flashing and glittering till it fairly dazzled me. I wish I knew who he was. I am afraid old Mr. Crommles will be no wiser than myself!"

Like the single line of epitaph which could be read a hundred and forty-four different ways, Mrs. Boyle contrived out of one man's appearance to ring the changes for two Irish miles, and when she reached home the subject seemed as far from being exhausted as ever.

"Have you heard about the handsome stranger we had to-day in church, Ruth?" she asked, when that elderly handmaiden came in to lay the cloth. "He was a proper sort of man. Did you tell nurse about the way he stared me out of countenance, Berna?"

"No, mamma," murmured the girl; and one swift glance at her downcast face told Ruth who the stranger was.

"Anybody might think," said Mrs. Boyle, addressing her daughter, "we were seeing strangers every day, for all you seem to think or care about them. I declare I did not know which way to look. His eyes seemed to be in every place at once. I couldn't lift mine without meeting his full. I wonder he wasn't ashamed of himself, and in church, too. As I was telling this girl coming along, it's not often we see anything like him. Mr. Garnsey, of course, put himself forward, setting the pew-door wide, as if there wasn't another seat—quite empty seats where he'd have been far more at home than where he was. I do wish you could have seen him, Ruth—coal-black hair, not curly, but with just a wave in it; bright dark eyes; a skin like a gipsy's, only clearer; and a ring you wouldn't match in any jeweller's in Belfast. I don't know that I ever saw his equal; and there are fine men, and plenty, to be met any afternoon in Sackville Street. I wonder who in all the wide world he can be. I would like well to know where he comes from."

"Should you, mem? I think I could tell you," said Ruth.

"That's a good joke; and you never set eyes on him in your life."

"I'm not so sure of that, mem. By your description of him, if he's not Mr. Muir's son, he might be that son's twin brother; and a pretty sort of character he is, if we're to believe all the tales that are told about him."

"But he can't be Mr. Muir's son!" exclaimed Mrs. Boyle. "Berna, you know he can't."

"How should *I* know, mamma?"

"You're quite right, Miss Berna," said Ruth; "how should *you* know anything about Mr. Muir's son? It's not very likely. For all his good looks, I'm told he's as wild a lot as ever went headlong to destruction. His old uncle took and reared him, and gave him the best of training and of schooling—paid his expenses at the college in Dublin, and meant to start him as a gentleman; but he couldn't do it. The bad blood came out, and he was forced to turn him

out of doors for his ill-behaviour. And now he's no better than a common jockey, going about to fairs and markets, and consorting with all sorts of characters but respectable. Mr. Garnsey ought to think shame of himself, having the young man at Beechfield. To be sure, Mr. Garnsey's not much to boast of in the way of respectability; but he should think of his motherless daughter. People are laughing already, and saying Gorman Muir has as keen an eye for money as ever his father had."

Having finished which criminating sentence, Ruth placed the spoons and knives and forks on the table with great energy, and retired from the field, where Mrs. Boyle remained for a moment stricken dumb.

"Did you ever hear, Miss Berna," asked Ruth that night, as she was brushing the girl's long hair with tenderly caressing hand, "how Mr. Muir fell in with his first wife, and money to start him in this farm? And he has got on past the common; for when he came first to these parts he never thought to live at Ardilaw."

No. Berna had not heard anything about Mr. Muir's antecedents.

"Well, it seems that there was up in the county Donegal a young lady, motherless, like Miss Garnsey, but more lonely still, because her father was married for the second time, and spent all his time in England with his grand wife and the sons she bore him."

"Yes, nurse; and the young lady—"

"She couldn't have been much account," went on Ruth, "or she never could have so far forgot herself as to talk like an equal to one such as Hewson Muir, the son of her father's bailiff. Don't you think that yourself, Miss Berna?"

"Indeed I do," answered the girl. Her face was half hidden by a veil of hair; but in the glass Ruth could see it flush crimson as she spoke.

"Well," resumed the woman, "by what I can understand, this went on for a long time, till at last he persuaded her to marry him, making sure she would have her mother's fortune. Instead of that, not a penny of it came to her, and you may

be sure that was a fine disappointment to young Muir."

"You mean Mr. Muir, our landlord—"

"Of course I do; he was young once; he was far younger than his son is now when he got so far over the poor girl as to induce her to do such a thing as marry him—the wicked wretch that he was. However, the secret was kept for a while; but it leaked out in time, and Mr. Gorman—that was the father's name—came over from London and turned his daughter out of doors, and wouldn't forgive her, though she begged and prayed him to do so on her bended knees."

"Ah!" exclaimed Berna, with a little gasp.

"I don't say it was right," said Ruth; "for, after all, no matter how far wrong she had gone, she was still his own flesh and blood; but still it must have been hard for one like Mr. Gorman to find his child had so demeaned herself. Anyway, he wouldn't forgive her, and Muir found himself married, and his father discharged from his situation, and little between them all and beggary."

"What did he do?" asked Ruth's auditor.

"He took a cottage in the neighbourhood and laid himself out to annoy his father-in-law. You may be sure the Gormans didn't like the notion of having Mr. Muir settling down at their very gates. So the family lawyer was taken into counsel; and they proposed among them that if the pair would go away to Australia they should have something to begin the world out there on."

"How was it they did not go?"

"He agreed to go. The lawyer paid the passage-money, and never gave Muir the amount they promised till he was on board the vessel. Then he managed somehow to give them the slip, and the first thing they heard from him was that he had taken this farm, that his wife had a son, and that she was dying. She couldn't stand the life, poor thing! She had been delicately nurtured—never knew what it was to put her hand to anything, or do a turn for herself. Then his father and mother lived with them: and it must have been cruel work for one reared as she was. They say she died of a broken heart. She made one appeal to Mr. Gorman for

the boy; but he'd have nothing to do with him or her. She just dwined away and died. The person that told me said she wasn't heavier nor a child when they lifted her into her coffin. Her mother's brother, Mr. Trevasson, shamed Mr. Gorman into having her buried among her own people; but I don't know that did her much good. He had just come home from abroad, and he took the boy and brought him up like his own son, and they say he'd have done well by him, and left him money at his death, only the cloven foot peeped out. This young man's worse nor his father ever was, I understand—a wild reckless devil—God forgive me for calling one of His creatures such a name; and O, Miss Berna, my dear, have a care, and remember you've no father living to look after you, and the mistress, in a manner of speaking, wants to be looked after herself; and though it's no use crying over spilt milk, why did you ever refuse the old lady's offer to go and live with her in honour and comfort? I can't bear to think of all you threw away, and just for nothing. You see yourself the mistress could content

herself better among those she was used to once than if she had a choice of the first in the land."

Berna did not answer for a moment. Slowly and thoughtfully she drew a strand of her hair through her fingers, before she said,

"If it had to be done over again, nurse, I should still say I would never leave mamma."

"Well, dear, it's a pity, that's all. You'll have to be wonderful wise to keep yourself to yourself, if you don't want to get into trouble. It is a wicked world, and besides—"

"Are you going to talk all night?" asked Mrs. Boyle, entering the room; "and do put up your hair, Berna. Anybody would think it was something wonderful, to see how fond you are of sitting with it all streaming down your back."

"Nurse was telling me about Mr. Muir's first wife, mamma," said Berna, gathering her obnoxious tresses together and coiling them round her head.

"Nurse might find something better to do than stand repeating idle gossip—on a Sunday,

too," retorted Mrs. Boyle, with a good deal of acrimony. "For my part, there is nothing in the world I think so ill of as evil speaking and backbiting. It would be a great deal more fitting for nurse to sit down and read her Bible than to stand there encouraging you in vanity, and telling stories that likely have not a word of truth in them."

"It is gospel truth, mem, that a lady married Mr. Muir, and never rued doing so but once," replied nurse stoutly.

"We should but speak about people as we find them," persisted Mrs. Boyle; "and I can only say I consider Mr. Muir a most obliging and agreeable person."

"Well, mem," said Ruth, with the familiar freedom of an old servant, "each one to her taste. I only know Mr. Muir wouldn't be mine."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE equinoctial gales had swept over Ardilaw; all the flowers, fuchsias, marigolds, dahlias, and hollyhocks, which during the autumn made even Mr. Muir's neglected garden one mass of colour and beauty, were lying sodden and dead, awaiting the great "redding up," which only took place when nothing else about the farm required attention. Brown and yellow leaves littered the lawn and the meadows lying beside the stream. On the apple-trees there still remained a few russets Miss Muir was letting "hang" while the dried-up stalks would bear their weight. The hay and corn had long been carted into the yard and built into great stacks, where already a colony of mice and rats were snugly ensconced in winter quarters. The potatoes were all stored in the spacious outhouses, not "clamped," as is the English custom. Not a thing was in the fields, save man-

golds and swedes. A pause had ensued in country life; and under the gleams of a watery sun in late October the rural landscape looked strangely still and lonely.

Even at Beechfield, not a scrap of mignonette or bit of heliotrope remained to greet the passer-by with a whiff of the departed summer. In the greenhouses there was little to be seen but chrysanthemums. Nature seemed taking a rest before covering her head and disappearing from sight under the snows of December and the frosts which so bless the earth when they come early in the year.

One fine morning, not three months after that day when he came across the hayfield, leading his horse by the bridle, Gorman Muir and his father walked slowly up the hill leading to Craigantlet. They had paced the length of the back avenue at Ardilaw, and wandered out into the Bangor Road more for the convenience of uninterrupted conversation than with any idea of exercise.

Very early the younger man had, according to

his wont, gone down to the post-office for his letters, and it so chanced that he brought one back with him which Mr. Muir imagined might change all his plans.

It was from Mr. Trevasson's solicitors, enclosing the long-deferred order for one thousand pounds. Gorman had expected this order for such a period that he at length relinquished all hope of getting it; then, in a moment, as so often happens, when the matter was well-nigh forgotten, fortune came to him in the guise of a lawyer's letter. Since its arrival he had been very quiet and thoughtful, and Mr. Muir felt he could know no rest till he heard what his son meant to do.

"Now you've got the money," he said, "I suppose you'll be for leaving us."

Gorman looked at him, and hesitated a moment before he answered,

"I'm not so sure of that!"

"Why, I've heard you say a score times, if you'd the means, you would start for the wild West within a week."

"Yes; but you see I had not the money then.

Now that I have got it, I shall think twice before I leave Ireland."

"What! Do you mean you'll stop on *here?*"

"Is there any reason why I should not?"

"No; no reason at all in the world; only I thought you were not just content."

"I was not; but I am growing more and more content every day. Money, as you have often told me, makes more; and I fail to see why, with this thousand pounds, I should not do a great deal of good for myself."

"That you might, man—that you might. And so you really have made up your mind to stick to the old county of Down, instead of rushing off to a country where you know nobody, and where, as far as I can tell, nobody particularly wants you?"

"That is precisely my intention," said his son; "if the county of Down will stick to me, I will stick to the county of Down. I have come round to your opinion that there is gold to be dug out of the earth here, without crossing the ocean to find a mine in America."

"I am sure and certain that there is,' answered Mr. Muir.

"And I want to make a lot of money."

"And some day, perhaps, you'll be thinking of marrying?"

"Some day. Yes; no doubt; but not till I grow a good deal richer than I am."

"Maybe if you make up to the right woman you mightn't require to be so rich, after all."

"I should never like to be dependent on my wife."

"Well, I don't say that might be exactly necessary either," said Mr. Muir, laughing in his sleeve at the thought of how matters were taking the course he desired. "It is early days to be considering that part of the business, and I'm heart glad to find you've no thought of leaving us all. I was afraid when that letter came you'd be for packing and starting off at once."

"No," replied Gorman. "I will not go—yet, at any rate."

"I hope you'll never go at all—I'd miss you now as I never thought to miss anybody"—and

there ensued a moment's silence; while Mr. Muir turned his head in the direction of Scrabo to conceal an emotion of which, perhaps, he felt ashamed, and Gorman looked steadily up the hill, feeling also ashamed of himself, though from a perfectly different reason.

It was Gorman who spoke first.

"Then I may remain at Ardilaw?" he said.

"Where else would you stay but in your father's house till you've a house of your own?" retorted Mr. Muir.

"If I stop, as I shall stop, since you are so kind, I do not think it would be right—"

"Speak out! What's on your mind? What is it you think would not be right?"

"Now that I have money and am in the way of making money to remain a burden on you."

"What sort of a burden?"

"Well, my keep must cost something. I do not profess to be able to live on air—and—"

"You want to pay me for your board, I suppose. Now let one word serve: put that notion out of your head. Child of mine shall

never give me money for his bite and sup. When I can't afford to bid those welcome I brought into the world, I hope I'll be nearly out of it. Besides, about a house like this, what do you think the keep of one more can signify? It's not like as if we'd to go to market for the things we need; and we make no stranger of you. Just what we're used to ourselves we set before you, so never speak a sentence of that sort again. When you are any charge to me I have the use of my tongue, and can tell you, don't be a bit afraid."

"Thank you! I'm sure you are very generous."

"Generous! Nobody ever accused me before of being that, and I am very sure nobody will again. I'd be sorry, though, to act like old Mrs. Monro, who, after asking her son and her son's wife and the child and its nurse on a visit, quarrelled with them, and brought in a bill for six weeks' board and lodging. Faith! and she got it, too, for she processed them at the court."

"Well, if ever you repent, you won't have to process me, for I will pay without a murmur,"

laughed Gorman; "but there is something I want you to give me leave to have and pay the expense of."

"And that is?"

"I should like a corner to myself, where you and I could talk over any matter we wanted to discuss without the chance of being interrupted Now if I might furnish that room opposite to where we sit, and call it my own while I stop at Ardilaw, I should be very glad indeed."

Instantly that deep dull red which always gave the idea he must have received some heavy sudden blow overspread Mr. Muir's face, and though he struggled to answer calmly he could not command his voice, and was forced to keep silence.

"I am sorry," exclaimed his son. "I would not have said a word had I thought it could vex you. It was thoughtless of me. I will never mention a thing of the sort again."

"Wait a minute; don't be in such a hurry," entreated Mr. Muir with a mighty effort, temporarily strangling the demon of pride that had been choking him. "Between father and son

there ought to be no huff taken when no offence was meant. You did put me out for a bit, I'll not deny; but that's all over now. You're quite right; the house is not what you've been used to. I felt how it would be before you came here; but I never thought you would find as little fault as you have done. In the first blush of it, though, if you consider, no man likes to be told his house, or his horse, or his furniture, or his manners might be mended; and I suppose I'm just as great a fool as my neighbours in that particular. But mind, Gorman, I'm not such a fool as to expect what contented me to content you; and there was a time once when I'd have liked well to gather handsome things about me, and hold my head higher it may be than I'd any right to hold it; but I was forced to give up that notion, as many another has had to forego his notion. When I first took possession of Kilmoon Farm, after paying for the tenant-right and a few odd things about the premises—all the best had been auctioned off—I found myself with a trifle over two hundred and eighty pounds to get cattle and

implements and necessary furniture. You know it is reckoned the least any man can stock a farm with is ten pounds to the acre; so you can cast that out at your leisure. I had my father and mother to keep; and I've buried three wives, and spent a small fortune in doctor's bills; and the girls have all had some sort of education; and I don't owe one in the world sixpence, except the rent that'll be due to Mr. Garnsey next gale-day, and that's lying ready for him in the bank. I don't know how it has been done, upon my conscience, I don't;" and Mr. Muir, overwhelmed with the remembrances of struggle which lay behind and the evidences of success spread around, paused in his vehement recital as though he had been suddenly struck with lightning.

"It certainly seems very wonderful," agreed Gorman, with hearty warmth.

"But I have run far away from what we started talking about," said Mr. Muir, taking himself well in hand like a horse inclined to bolt. "Do what you please with that room where the grand ladies used to sit, as I've heard, with their

hoops, and their hair powdered, playing the harpsichord and spinet, and working their sofa cushions, and suchlike, just as other ladies do to-day, only with a different sort of wool. Many's the time I've felt vexed myself to see it turned to no better use than a store for seed corn and beans and peas. There's not much doing now, so I'll tell Ned to begin and clear everything out, and after dinner I'll break the news to Bell, who'll, maybe, not be best pleased. She has a wonderful temper of her own, Bell, and I'm not just so fond of crossing it."

"If you think my having the room will put her out we had better think no more about it. We ought not to cross Bell—she is such a capital manager."

"Sometimes it strikes me she is a bit too much of a manager. I've often lately had my doubts about the butter."

"About the—" suggested Mr. Gorman Muir, dumfounded.

"About the butter—don't I speak plain enough?—you see it's a serious matter: she has

the whole management of the dairy, and though we have more cows than we used, I don't find that the quantity we sell increases as it ought."

"But Bell wouldn't do a thing like that," remonstrated the young man.

"Her mother would, at any rate; and there's no use blinking facts: children take after the mother, more's the pity; you're the very 'moral' of yours; Bell is her own mother, as one might say. I can't tell who Sarah strains after—nobody worth talking about, anyhow—while Carline, she has a way of gathering lovers round her just like what *her* mother had. Bell can't bear anybody to have anything or be made of but herself; and her mother, if she'd heard me remark a girl was pretty, would never have ceased scolding for a week. She was beyond the common jealous, and of me, too!" added Mr. Muir, in righteous astonishment; "while as for Carline's mother, it was I had reason to be jealous of her. She just did it with a look and a trick of the eye, and a little half smile, so faint you'd have scarce noticed it. No matter who came, he stopped. No matter

where we went, she was accounted a sort of saint, she had such pleasant manners and such winning ways; and I swear to you, Gorman, the happiest day of my whole life was the day I saw her a corpse. But I am talking folly and nonsense. What's the use of raking over dead ashes? We'll make a picture of that room yet; but if you take my advice you will just get off to Belfast as soon as you've had your dinner and bank that money; then, when you get home, don't heed a single word Bell says."

"I'll get off, I think, without waiting for any dinner," replied the young man. "The days draw in so soon now I sha'n't have too much time in town."

"It might be just as well," agreed Mr. Muir, who preferred, when war seemed impending between himself and Bell, that the combat should be got over in private. "Go in and brush yourself a bit. The horse'll be ready by the time you are. Ned shall have him for you at the front door."

With the cold sunlight falling upon him

through the leafless branches, Gorman Muir rode slowly down the avenue, as fine-looking a man, possessed of as untrained a nature as ever, in the old days when might was right, spurred on in tournament or battle. A thousand wild projects floated through his brain; dreams bright and fair deluded him with their false, smiling faces. He would be rich, honoured, courted; he would woo, and win, and wed the only girl he had ever seen he felt he could marry; he would build a great house, and buy a fine estate, and mix on equal terms with the descendants of those who once in hoop and powder held festival at Ardilaw; he would— But at that point he was recalled to the realities of life.

A small woman, dressed in widow's weeds, with faded blue eyes and a pinkish nose, was fumbling over the latch, trying to open the gate.

"Allow me," said Gorman; and in a trice he was on the ground and holding the gate wide for her to pass through.

"Is Miss Muir within?" she asked with modest trepidation.

Hat in hand, the young man assured her she would find Miss Muir at the house; then, leading his horse through, and closing the gate behind him, Gorman sprang into his saddle, and, satisfied concerning Mrs. Boyle's whereabouts, selected the least traversed road to Belfast, which took him straight past Clear Stream Cottage.

He paused where the rivulet ran under the lane; and, rising in his stirrups, looked over the tiny domain. Not a soul was in sight—the place was utterly still. The very birds had hushed their songs and were quiet. Beside the parlour window Berna sat reading some book which evidently enchained her interest, for she never moved, though he watched her for some time.

At length, however, the curious influence one human being's scrutiny has over another asserted itself. Suddenly she looked up—saw a familiar face peering at her over the hedge; then, while a vivid blush mounted to her forehead, she closed the book and swiftly left the window, never to sit near it again.

END OF VOL. I.